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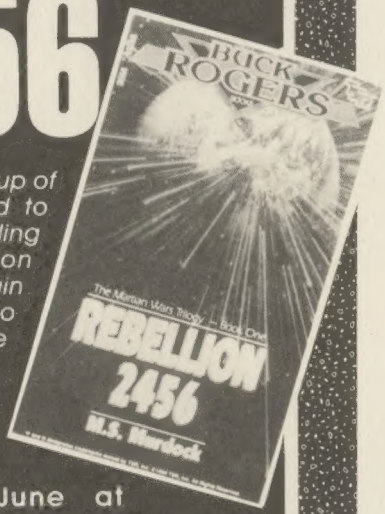

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Reflections

Robert Silverberg

Sometimes the story behind the story is a pretty peculiar one. In case you were ever wondering, for instance, why it is that you occasionally read a story by one author that reminds you very much of something another author has written —

A couple of years ago, I got a letter from my good friend Gregory Benford, who asked me to write a story for an anthology he and Martin Harry Greenberg were putting together. The theme was parallel history, the good old "what-if" notion — specifically, what would have happened if some great event of history had failed to take place.

That's a kind of science fiction that has always appealed to me, and I told Greg and Marty that I'd be glad to contribute. Some months later, when it was time to get down to serious thinking about the story, I looked about for some appropriately great event that I could unhappen, and came up with the Hebrew Exodus from Egypt. All right, I said: suppose Moses never made it across the Red Sea? What then? (An experienced science-fiction writer can take almost any sort of what-if and spin it into a story by considering the consequences of his premise.)

Well, thought I, if instead of getting to Palestine the Israelites had remained forever in bondage in the land of Pharaoh, a minor sect worshiping an obscure god, then a good deal of the history of the Middle East, and of the entire world, gets shifted around. Remove the Jews from Palestine and you'd be removing Jesus from Nazareth. If that annoying preacher had not been wandering around the Holy Land uttering subversive ideas, it would never have been necessary for the ruling forces of the Palestinian establishment (both Jewish and Roman) to get rid of him by crucifying him. Eliminate the concept of Jesus as martyr and much of the structure of Christianity disappears. And the Roman Empire, if it hadn't been undermined by those pesky Christians, might well have fended off the barbarians and lasted another couple of thousand years.

I had my situation: a triple "what-if" that kept the Jews in Egypt, eliminated Christianity as a factor in history, and sidestepped the Fall of Rome. Now it was easy enough to put together my story, set in a revised version of our own era (not the twentieth century, anymore) in which a *new* Moses rises up to make a second try at leading the Jews out of Egypt — not to Palestine, this time, but into space.

It was called "To the Promised Land." In the spring of 1989 it appeared in *Omni*, and a few months later it duly was reprinted in the Benford-Greenberg anthology.

About the same time, I happened to skim through a review of Donald A. Wollheim's 1989 *World's Best SF* annual, and mention of a story called "Waiting for the Olympians" by Frederik Pohl caught my eye. "Set in a twentieth-century world in which the

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Him too?

Well, if Fred and I were overlapping themes, it wouldn't be the first time — or even the second or the third. We had found ourselves enmeshed in these coincidences on plenty of occasions over the decades, as I suppose any two prolific SF writers will. But I had a special reason for being upset. Since writing "To the Promised Land," I had taken a second look at my parallel-universe scheme and decided it was worth exploring in greater detail, perhaps as a group of nine or ten stories that could be collected as a book. I had worked out a chart of Roman Imperial history covering the two thousand years following Augustus, and I had even written a second story on the theme, "Tales from the Venia Woods," for the fortieth anniversary issue of *The Magazine of Fantasy & Science Fiction*.

For all I knew, Fred Pohl was going to be writing a similar series, and we'd be treading on each other's toes for years to come. I didn't read his story; I didn't want to know how he had handled the theme, because I might then feel constrained to avoid using similar ideas. Instead I wrote to him — we know each other well; we had just been traveling together in Italy a few weeks before, in fact — and told him what had happened. I asked him to tell me where his parallel history had diverged from the real path, hoping he hadn't played around with the Exodus also.

No, he hadn't. But otherwise his premise wasn't all that different from mine. His story, he replied, "assumes that Tiberius' brother, who was actually killed in a border clash while still young, survived and was in due course the one who succeeded Augustus as emperor. So Tiberius, thus spared all the losses and palace intrigues that soured his disposition, eventually became the procurator in Judaea instead of Pilate and, being a reasonable man, when Jesus was brought before him gave him thirty lashes and sent him home instead of crucifying him. Therefore Christianity never got off the ground; Rome was not weakened by battling Christian sects; there were never any religious wars and by now Rome is global and pretty much at peace. . . ."

Fred hadn't read my story (which had been published after his, though we had written them about the same time. His was for the same Benford-Greenberg anthology as mine.) Was he thinking of writing other stories set in the same world, I asked? "I've toyed with the idea," he said, "but I don't know whether I'll actually ever get around to it."

I wasn't sure where that left my own project. Reliable third parties assured me that Fred's handling of the theme was nothing like mine in tone or concept. All we had in common was the basic notion of the survival of the Roman Empire into modern times as a result of the non-emergence of Christianity. Maybe it would be safe after all for me to continue writing the stories I had in mind, without worrying about stumbling into Fred's parallel parallel universe.

But then I happened to glance at the book-review section of *Publishers Weekly*, which discussed a book called *Cry Republic*, by Kirk Mitchell:

"In his thoughtful alternate-history novels, Mitchell (*Procurator*) envisions a world in which Jesus was never crucified and the Roman Empire has survived 2000 years. Its enlightened Caesar Germanicus sets this sequel in motion with his attempts to restore the

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Roman Republic to its former glory...."

Oh, my. Not only has somebody else been ploughing the same turf, but he's been doing it long enough to have the *second* novel in a series on its way to the bookstores.

I don't know what rationale Kirk Mitchell uses for his version of the eternal Roman Empire. I doubt that it's anything like mine or Fred's. But it doesn't matter. The steam engine got invented when it was steam-engine time; and right now is Roman Empire time, I guess. I may write more stories in my own series, or maybe I won't. The theme seems a little overutilized at the moment. I didn't read Fred Pohl's story, he didn't read mine, and neither of us had ever heard of Kirk Mitchell *or* his two Roman novels. And here we all are. It's a very small parallel world, folks.

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THE INSCRIPTION ON THE STATUE OF LIBERTY AT THE STARPORT ON LUTHHUGIAN, PLANET OF THE OUTCASTS

On random outworlds of our yellow dwarfs
I see creation plagues are spreading
As genetic engineers turned Epimethian,
With restriction enzyme wizardry
And outlawed miscombinant DNA
Are creating life forms God would not.

Code breakers, outlaw gods, corrupted
By perversion of genius unshackled,
They are interspeciating species,
Splicing human DNA with animal
To see undreamed sentient shapes writhe up
From their churning protein soups.

Not mutants, not subhumans, these human hybrids,
Possessors of cognition, self-aware,
Are yet enslaved or trashed on whim or impulse.
I cry for those who broke their chains, now hiding free
In reeking sanctuaries, at risk of instant death
For the crimes of their creators.

I plead with those who care, to spare these *human* lives.
Send me your mutants, your subhumans,
Your huddled hybrids yearning to breathe free,
The wretched refuse of your outlaw play.
Send these, creation cursed, to me.
I lift my gamma aser lamp to guard their way.

— Mike Curry

MEMORIES THAT DANCE LIKE DUST IN THE SUMMER HEAT

by N. Lee Wood

art: Hank Jankus

About this story N. Lee Wood tells us, "My mother was eight month's pregnant with me while still working in the OR as a surgical nurse, so it's conceivable I've literally got nursing in my blood. I worked in the OR very closely with a neurosurgeon, and I've been fascinated by the mind and the brain from the first time I saw a living brain under my fingers. Outer space and the inner space of the mind may be man's last wild, wild frontiers."

Lee lives in Paris, France, with writer Norman Spinrad, and she is currently working on a near-future science-fiction novel.

— for Dr. Larry Franks and Dr. Thaddeus Achord

The coroner, squinting through the flashing lights of emergency vehicles, followed the body down the steps of the house. He pushed his hands into his pockets against the chill night air. Men's figures flitted between headlights in silhouetted obscurity. As the paramedics snapped the legs of the transport gurney upright, one of the figures stepped into the light of the ambulance.

"Fred," the man said to the coroner.

The coroner recognized the police lieutenant. "Clint," he responded.

"I'd like to take a look at the body."

The coroner nodded to one of the paramedics. He watched the lieutenant's expression as the body bag was unzipped and the sheet covering the woman's face was lifted. The lieutenant's face froze into an almost bored look as he stared down at the corpse. The coroner had to admire the lieutenant's iron composure. He glanced at the dead woman's body, blue lips open in a pale, blotched face, eyes staring, dark hair curling on a bloodstained sheet.

Finally, the lieutenant nodded and looked away, back at the lights of the police vehicles.

"I want Special Services on this one," the lieutenant said quietly.

The coroner raised an eyebrow as the paramedics exchanged uneasy looks. "Clint. . . ," he started to protest.

"Call in a Retriever, Fred." The lieutenant turned to him, the seemingly bored expression eradicated by the passion in his eyes and the pain in his voice. "I want this one nailed down tight and fast. Do it."

The coroner shrugged, sighing. "All right," he said.

The lieutenant nodded, then walked away from the body without a second look, disappearing into the flashing red-blue-red-blue of the police lights.

The body bounced disjointedly as the paramedics maneuvered it into the ambulance. They slammed the rear double doors shut and turned question-

ingly toward the coroner.

He glanced at his watch, already thinking of the long procedure ahead of him, calculating the time. "Take her to County," he said. "I'll call Special Services."

14.8.92 B.P.D./S.S. 6844958AE
HUTCHINSON, MEADE S./ CRS FL# 2
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"Mrs. Valencia?"

The woman peering through the torn screen door had that same haunted look I'd seen so many times before. It was the look of a mother who knows what the man is going to say before he speaks and is prepared to deny it as soon as it is spoken.

The plainclothes detective standing beside me showed the woman his gold shield and ID. "Mrs. Valencia, I'm Lt. Clinton Stuart of the 57th West Precinct." He indicated me with his other hand. "This is Ms. Meade Hutchinson with Special Services." I smiled my reassuring smile and nodded. "May we come in?"

Mrs. Valencia opened the screen door. She wore a faded print dress a size too small, contouring the bulges of her aging body. Curlers were fastened tightly against her head, and the smell of setting lotion was ghastly sweet in the stifling summer air. A small dog yipped from the doorway as we entered the house, and she snapped at it to shut up. A blue haze of tobacco smoke hung in the air from a cigarette left burning in an ashtray perched on the arm of a frayed couch. The place spoke of borderline poverty etched out in depressing shades of dirty grey.

She stood staring up at Clint, shoulders hunched together defiantly, her blunt, cracked hands drying each other nervously on her thin apron.

"Mrs. Valencia," Clint said, and hesitated, a subconsciously practiced pause still genuine in its compassion. He had never lost his empathy even when the speech had become repetitive. "I'm truly sorry."

Mrs. Valencia's face began to crumble. She clenched her teeth together, tears welling in her eyes. I cemented my sympathetic smile firmly into place and stared over her head at an ornately gilded crucifix with detached interest.

I'd always felt guilty at my reaction, retreating to a safe mental vantage point where I could observe, analyze, and remain unaffected by the tragedy Clint brought to people. I'd been assured this was a protective device, that I was no less a person to protect myself from emotional trauma. Toughness was an asset in my line of work, nearly a requirement for my sanity's sake, but I couldn't rid myself of the guilt that crept in behind it.

"It's Marrisa," Mrs. Valencia whispered.

Clint nodded. The woman's eyes glazed over in a numbed expression of disbelief as she sank down to the couch.

"How bad?" she asked, holding out for the last bit of hope.

"I'm afraid she's dead, ma'am," Clint said.

The woman squeezed shut her eyes and leaned her head back on her thick neck, teeth clenched as she made little high-pitched noises of grief in her throat. Clint sat down beside her, gently placing his large hands over hers. I sat in the only chair in the room, smoothing my skirt under me, and crossed my legs. The chair was the sad mate to the grey couch, with a small, round crocheted doily over each arm to hide the nudity of the fabric beneath it. My fingers idly traced the design as I watched Clint doing his job.

I liked Clint. He was the only son of a naturalized Scottish immigrant and a full-blooded Polynesian woman. He'd been born on the Big Island of Hawaii and had come to the mainland when he was three. He was cheerfully approaching fifty, his only complaint about his age being the slow loss of his curly hair. A big man, his physique as well as his dark good looks were a result of his mother's heritage, but his personality he owed to his father. Clint was happily married, with two teenaged sons and a daughter, and his family life was a reflection of the man: calm, reasonable, and easygoing.

His family had lived next to mine, and Clint had become a big brother to my parent's only child. While I had traveled around the country, transferring from one college to another, he had stayed close to home, graduating from the hometown university and the police academy. By the time I'd finally graduated from the University of Chicago with a degree in art history, he had advanced faultlessly to a gold shield in the Homocide division. I discovered quickly that I had no interest in teaching art, and found my degree little help in any profitable career. Clint coaxed me into taking an aptitude test for the Special Services, and I was soon employed with their division. My parents had been eager to see their restless baby daughter settle closer to home, and were delighted to find me working with Clint. They were very proud of me; they felt Special Services to be a prestigious and important job.

I thought it was a very strange match: gentle, soft-spoken Clint, a Homocide detective, and an overeducated uptown girl, a Retriever for Special Services.

Now we sat in the living room of a murdered girl's mother. Clint wore his regulation brown suit and tie, his badge hanging from one pocket and his shoulder-holstered gun making a lump on his side. I had on my standard career woman's uniform: the plain respectable silk blouse and dark skirt and jacket. We sat and waited for the overwrought woman to regain her composure long enough for us to elicit her consent to process Marrisa Valencia's remains. It was all very professional.

"You tell me," Mrs. Valencia finally choked out. She would be outraged now in order to control her anguish. "You tell me how this happened."

"We're not quite sure, ma'am," Clint said. "Marrisa didn't show up for work this morning, and one of her coworkers went by her apartment after she didn't answer their telephone call. Her car was there, but she didn't answer the door. The manager of the apartments found her and called the police. She was killed probably early this morning."

Clint had left out a bit of his story. He left out that Marrisa had been the fourth girl killed in as many weeks, all with the same MO, all with the same kind of weapon. He left out that forensics had led nowhere, and there were no suspects. He left out that, like most high-crime, low-income neighborhoods, none of the terrified inhabitants had seen or heard a thing. We had had a small break with Marrisa. She had lingered on for a few hours after she had been left for dead, and her body was still fresh enough, unlike any of the previous three victims, to be processed. This might be the only break we had.

"Tell me how," Mrs. Valencia demanded, her voice petulant, still not completely convinced.

Clint's voice was nearly liquid as he gathered her hands up in his own. "Marrisa was stabbed to death, Mrs. Valencia," he said gently. "We think it might be someone she knew."

Mrs. Valencia began rocking back and forth on the couch, fast and violently, a wail bubbling up out of her mouth. "Who could have done such a thing? My baby! Who would she know who could do this to my angel?"

Her keening was increasingly loud and intense, irritating me, irritating my sense of propriety. Exhibitions of grief were embarrassing, beating against the self-control I rigidly held myself in. A sudden flash of anger and disgust for Mrs. Valencia was quickly crushed under a wave of liberal guilt, and I pulled away mentally, isolating myself from her and her misery. I picked idly at my cuticles, ruining an expensive manicure. The staleness of the house was oppressive. I felt sticky and dirty in the humid summer heat.

Clint was still following the script, making soothing sounds that weren't quite words, while I waited for my cue. I picked harder at the cream-pink nail polish on my thumb.

"Mrs. Valencia," Clint said, not trying to rush her, "we still have a chance at finding your daughter's killers, but we need your help."

"You don't *know*?" Mrs. Valencia spat at him in anger, scratching out for someone to hold responsible for her pain. "You haven't caught them yet?"

"We don't have anyone in custody, ma'am, but we do have methods still open to us that can help, if you will help us."

"What can *I* do?" she asked.

That was it. I was on. I turned up my sympathy mask and leaned forward toward the woman. Clint turned his body to include me into the conversation.

"Ms. Hutchinson has been assigned to this case with me. She's a Registered Retriever for the State. I've worked very closely with her many times,

and she's quite capable. We'd like to get your consent to have Marrisa's remains processed."

I smiled encouragingly as she turned to stare at me, her brows creased together, uncertain, uncomprehending.

"It must be done soon, or it will be too late. Your daughter wasn't found until this morning," Clint pressured her gently.

Her eyes widened in sudden understanding. "You're one of them mind readers," she accused me. I half-expected her to make a warding sign at me.

"I'm a Registered Memory Retriever, ma'am," I said, keeping my voice even and calm. The fascination and revulsion of people in my trade was intensified in narrow-minded, superstitious ignorants like Mrs. Valencia. Retrieving had been used for years since its development, reliably and accurately, but prejudice dies hard. The fact that it had been a secret tool used for spying by various intelligence agencies during its first few years helped Special Services' Public Relations not at all, and years of successful crime fighting had barely dented its bad reputation.

I despised having to defend myself repeatedly against stupid, time-wasting prejudice, but I went through the motions dutifully, by the book, maintaining my professional smile. "In cases like your daughter's, Special Services works with the police and the community to help apprehend and convict killers who might otherwise never be found. Everything is handled confidentially when it doesn't pertain to the case."

She had heard only my catch phrase: "*In cases like your daughter's. . . .*" Retrievers specialized in the sensational cases anyone reading a newspaper or watching a TV news broadcast would be familiar with. Marrisa was the latest in a well-publicized series of killings. As the realization hit her, her hands slowly crept to her face. She turned to Clint.

"Is it really that bad?" she pleaded with him.

It had bothered me at first, when I had just started working with Clint, that people would turn away from me, ignoring me, and invariably turn to him as the authority. It had made me feel as if I weren't considered quite trustworthy, or as if I were as much a depersonalized tool as Clint's gun or police car. I thought I had controlled that nasty feeling of impotence whenever it happened, but Mrs. Valencia annoyed me.

"It's bad, ma'am," I said, forcing her to turn back to me. Clint glanced up at me, but didn't interrupt. "Marrisa was tied up with a lamp cord, then raped and beaten. They tortured her, burned her with cigarettes. Even her parakeet was killed. Its head was bitten off."

I heard my voice coming out dispassionately, hard and cold, like little stones hitting at her. I watched her flinch under the words, as if I were far away, as if someone else were saying them. "I was at her apartment this morning. There was blood everywhere." I waited for the words to have full impact before I added the last bit of information. "She was stabbed over thirty times before they left. She bled to death slowly."

"Nononononono! Stop, God, stop!" the woman shrieked, folding up with her hands clenched to her head, ripping at the curlers in her hair. Clint glared scathingly at me in disapproval as he put his arm around her pathetic shivering body and patted her shoulder. I sat silently, kicking my leg out and back rhythmically, studying the play of light reflecting from the tip of my leather pump. She sobbed incoherently as I listened, detached, to the normal sounds outside the house. I could hear children shouting in Spanish, playing a game in the street, and the noise of honking horns from midday traffic. Somewhere, a tinny radio bleated, almost too faint to hear over the woman's crying.

When her tears had subsided into whimpers, I said, still looking down at the light on my shoe, "Don't let them get away with this, Mrs. Valencia. You have to help us to find and arrest the people who did this to your daughter. You *must* help us." I felt no pity, and my voice reflected it.

She straightened, wiping at her eyes. I could see the hatred in them as she stared at me, hating me for what I had told her, hating me for being a Retriever, hating me for placing her in this position. She turned to Clint.

"They will be convicted, for sure?" she both pleaded and demanded. "You can promise me this?"

"I can't guarantee what a court of law will do, ma'am," Clint said, taking over smoothly, radiating sympathy and confidence. "But without your consent, we won't have enough evidence, and Marrisa's killers will be left out there, free to kill again."

She nodded, eyes puffy and smeared. Clint helped her to her feet. "What must I do?" she asked.

"Come with us now, ma'am," Clint said, "We'll take you downtown to sign some consent papers. Ms. Hutchinson can begin as soon as they're signed and delivered."

She was helped into Clint's car, and he drove away with her. I drove directly to County and had changed into hospital surgical greens when Clint arrived at the outer desk with the consent forms. I emerged from the women's dressing room to see him waiting for me at the desk as I tucked the rest of my hair up into a paper cap.

"Why aren't you getting changed?" I asked him.

"Meade," he said quietly, ignoring my question, "don't you think you were just a little rough on the poor lady?"

"And what the hell would you rather I do?" I snapped back. "Be gracious and tactful and oh-so-nice and lose the consent, or pry them out of their pretty, idiotic biases so I can do the job I was hired for?"

Clint folded his lower lip under his teeth, gauging me with brown eyes radiating concern. "I don't know, Meade," he said finally. "After this Retrieval, why don't you see Dr. Gaffney again?"

I snorted. "You afraid I'm burning out?"

He raised an eyebrow at my challenge. "Possible," he said.

I redirected my irritation, turning toward the surgery desk nurse. "What's the status on the Valencia girl?" I demanded.

"The lab's still in processing. They're working as fast as they can," she informed me in a tone that said she knew I knew.

"Dammit," I said under my breathe, feeling impatient and edgy, feeling a pressure that burned just under my skin. I forced myself back into a semblance of calm.

"Come on, Meade," Clint said. "Let's go sit down."

He bought a cup of vending-machine coffee and sat down beside me on the hard wood bench in the hallway waiting area. "Want some water?" he asked.

I shook my head. "It only makes me hungrier, and the anesthesiologist doesn't like it." I hadn't eaten since I had been notified I was on stand-by the night before. Sometimes the procedure caused vomiting, and it was better to have an empty stomach.

"Meade," Clint said, his voice warm, "you're my friend. I've known you a long time, and I like working with you. I *know* you, and this isn't you. It's okay to shut yourself off a little bit on these cases. I think you know I've got some idea of what it's like by now, but, babe, you can't start hating people like this."

"Who says I've started hating anyone?" I snapped back, seethingly furious. "Who are you to tell me what *I* feel?"

He rolled the white styrofoam cup between his hands, leaning with his elbows on his knees to stare into the steaming liquid. The silence stretched out tightly between us, and I sat swinging my leg, out and back, out and back.

"Will you see Dr. Gaffney?" he asked quietly, a tone of iron finality.

I turned to frown at him defensively. "If I don't, you'll make a report to Special Services?" My reproach didn't move him. His silence confirmed it. I started to pick at my cuticles furiously, knowing he was right and resenting it all the same. "Damn you," I said under my breath. "All right. Okay."

He smiled at me and brought the cup up to his mouth to drain off the last of the coffee. The nurse stepped into the waiting area.

"Ms. Hutchinson, we're ready for you now."

Clint stood up with me and patted my shoulder before I walked into the main surgical core. Dr. Ewanalara and Dr. Franklin met me outside the OR suite. We shook hands.

"Hello, John," I said.

"Nice to see you again, Meade," Dr. Ewanalara said in his singsong accent. I had asked him once where he was from, but I'd forgotten and was always too embarrassed to have asked again. He was a short, slender dark man with a cheerful face and a splittingly wide grin. "You remember Harris Franklin?"

"Of course, how are you?"

He smiled and nodded in response.

Now that the amenities were satisfied, business could proceed.

"There wasn't any damage to the brain tissue, despite a rather bad injury to the face and neck. She was probably kicked." As Retrievals became more common, victims with head injuries appeared more frequently, an attempt to prevent the extraction of useful information. Sometimes, it worked. "Otherwise, it appears she was clean, no drugs, no booze, apparently a non-smoker." Dr. Ewanalara continued, "Death occurred roughly five and a half to six hours before County got her, so we'll definitely lose some of it, but it should be nothing major."

"Good," I said. It looked like it would be a clean Retrieval.

"There was a lot of other damage, though, really ugly stuff," he warned me. "It'll be a hell of a ride, Meade."

"Aren't they all?" I replied, trying to relieve some of the tension. "That's why I get the big money."

Through the glass in the OR door, I could see the technicians setting up equipment, preparing for the long hours the procedure would take.

"The lab's just about finished processing the last few injections, so we'll go ahead and establish the line before they get here. Dr. Rivera will be your anesthesiologist."

"Hi, Sam," I said. I knew most of the staff at County.

He smiled, a pleasant, quiet Hispanic man. I noticed a younger man hovering behind him, a resident eager to observe a relatively infrequent procedure.

"If you feel you need anything at any time, please let me know, okay?" Dr. Rivera said.

It was more for the benefit of the resident, but I nodded anyway. It was regulation to have an anesthesiologist on stand-by, but beyond the local used when the catheter line was established and keeping an eye on my vital signs, I would refuse any sedatives. I never used them on any of my Retrievals. I knew other Retrievers occasionally resorted to medications. It was more than a matter of pride with me. Although the testimony was still acceptable in court, juries tended to be negatively influenced if they saw the use of drugs during a Retrieval, weakening the prosecution's case. It was a painful and draining process, and I wasn't about to go through hell just to have my work jeopardized by a few milligrams of Valium.

The doctors tied their masks over their faces and walked into the OR suite with me. The circulating nurse helped me onto the operating table and placed a warm blanket over me, securing the black safety belt over my thighs. As the two surgeons left the room to scrub, I shrugged out of one sleeve of my top. The nurse clipped a towel around my wrist to secure it to an armboard. With my arm extended, she began to scrub my upper arm and the side of my chest with yellow soap.

Blotting the soap off with a sterile towel, she painted concentric circles

from inside my arm outward with a large brown Betadine stick. I watched my skin rise in little goose pimples from the chill in the room and the cold liquid. Even under the brown paint, I could see the little pale scars along my upper arm from previous Retrievals and thought briefly of Retrievals made before the blood-brain barrier problem in the processing had been overcome. Only a few years before I had entered Special Services, Retrievals were made by injection directly into the cerebral spinal fluid. I convinced myself that it was merely the cold in the room that made me shiver.

Dr. Franklin and Dr. Ewanalara backed into the room, their hands held up with water dripping from their elbows.

"How're you doing, Meade?" Dr. Ewanalara called out as the scrub nurse handed him a towel.

"Just fine," I said. As Dr. Franklin and the scrub nurse exchanged some light teasing banter, he winked at me, including me in on the joke, and the easy camaraderie helped me to relax. I was not so much a patient as a team member.

A blue paper barrier sheet was placed over me, and Dr. Rivera tucked the edges around my neck. Some Retrievers didn't care to watch and would request a screen. I watched. There was a muted clash of metal: a table and stand were dragged to the operating bed. The surgical team took their positions. Behind them, a video technician began to set up his camera.

"Ready now?" Dr. Ewanalara said as he took a small syringe from the scrub nurse. I nodded. He shot a small amount of the local anesthetic under my skin, and I watched the little bubbles form as the liquid was forced in. Through a small incision in the numbed skin, he dissected down with scissors and forceps.

"Hit me," he muttered, his forceps holding onto a small blood vessel I couldn't see from my angle. Dr. Franklin touched the metal forceps with the tip of the cautery, and I heard a *crackle-snap*. A thin line of smoke trailed out of the hole in my flesh. I wrinkled my nose and sighed. Dr. Franklin looked up at me and smiled over his mask.

"And this is the *fun* part," he said.

Careful to avoid any sudden rush of bleeding, Dr. Ewanalara inserted the thin catheter into a tiny slit made directly into my axillary artery, snaking it up to where it branched off the brachiocephalic artery. There, with the injections made into the catheter line, the processed chemicals would primarily be carried up the carotid artery and into my brain, bypassing the rest of my blood system to reduce the risk of disintegration or delay of the chemicals.

Tying a mask over his face, Clint entered the room, out of his brown suit and into wrinkled surgical greens. He winked at me and stood with the video technicians, conversing in low tones.

"Snap," Dr. Ewanalara said, holding out his hand. The scrub nurse slapped a small clamp into it immediately. As he secured the catheter line to

the blue sheets covering me, a lab assistant entered the room carrying a small metal box.

" 'Bout time," Dr. Franklin said, not looking up from his work.

"It's bad luck to shoot the gopher, y' know," the young man shot back with a chuckle and opened the metal box on an uncovered table. The scrub nurse gingerly lifted the sterile contents out of the box and placed them on her Mayo stand.

I stared up into the reflections in the overhead lights, silver bowls that distorted the images in the room. My face was hidden by the light in the center, but I could see stray hair curling dark against the white pillow.

"Okay, Meade," Dr. Ewanalara said, "here comes the first one."

"I'm ready," I said, smiling in a reflex gesture at the circulating nurse hovering beside me, her eyes crinkled in a smile over her mask. I closed my eyes, listening to the hum of the video recorder as the Retrieval was taped for the court.

Flashes.

"Got something," I said.

The room waited.

"Auditory, mostly. Some motor reflex," I said, identifying the area of the brain the extraction was from.

"Okay," I heard Dr. Ewanalara murmur.

"Music." I hummed out the tune being played inside my head. These were the chemical remnants processed from what was left of Marrisa Valencia's brain down into liquid form and pumped bit by bit into my bloodstream. They would speed along the tiny vessels in my brain, into the cerebral fluid, searching for the receptors they matched, and attach themselves momentarily to my nervous system. They were "xenograms," alien memories, unstable, transitory, dumping their chemical information and disintegrating within seconds after the neurons they stimulated had fired their sequences. Marrisa Valencia's mind would pass once more into being through my own before it vanished again, this time forever. I would become a dual persona, oscillating between Marrisa Valencia and Meade Hutchinson for the next nine hours, filtering memories to obtain those the court wanted: the last memories Marrisa Valencia recorded as she was being savagely murdered.

Flashes.

"Piano," I said, "I'm playing piano." My fingers jerked spasmodically as they hunted for nonexistent keys. "Mr. Amboyd wants his sheet music back by Thursday."

It would be like this for hours, sifting through irrelevant and often boring remnants, sometimes without any rhyme or pattern to them, sometimes connected to unrelated memories that would confuse my senses or my own logic. Some of the memories had already vanished, the weaker images, the short-term memories already deteriorated during the hours Marrisa Valen-

cia's body lay cold on her apartment floor. The stronger ones would survive. Her reinforced memories, strong, emotional images with greater amounts of chemical recordings, the horror of her last moments of fear and agony, would make it through the processing and the elapsed time. Now it was just a matter of methodically injecting small amounts of chemical extractions from the dead girl and sorting through the rubble.

"Phone's ringing," I said, hearing Marrisa's voice in my inner ear, while somewhere else in my own brain I was recording the sound of Clint's pencil scratching on paper as he took notes. "Hello?" I could hear my voice change as I supplied the other half of the conversation. "Marrisa, where've you been?" The voice caused a momentary flutter of emotion, ominously familiar. "Out, Mamma." Defensively. "Out where?" Suspiciously. "Mamma, I just went out for a while, okay?" "Oh? And who is he!" "None of your business! Leave me alone!"

The argument sputtered out and died incomplete. I felt myself trembling with deep anger and resentment.

Flicker, flicker, flicker.

"It's gone," I said. The images had played out and vanished as well as the emotions. "I didn't have any time sense with that. Sorry. I think that was a repetitive argument."

"That's okay, Meade. Here comes another," Dr. Ewanalara said. I felt the chill of the injection as it flowed through the tube under my skin.

Flashes.

"Still auditory," I said. "It's a bird making noise. The parakeet. 'Chack-chack-keee. Chack-kee.' " I imitated the sound of the bird. "I'm . . . she's trying to teach it to talk. It's somebody's name. Sometime last week."

I heard the video technician and Clint conferring in muffled tones. "Zero-nine-hundred-eighty-two feet," I heard the technician say. "Approx seven days ago." The technician would splice the tape into chronological order, restructuring her memories from the clues I could pick up from the jumble of memories. Irrelevant memories would be edited, the long intervals between memories deleted until the tape that would be played for the district attorney and any jury was clean, orderly, concise. Most people never knew that Retrievals were anything but.

Three more hours passed. I heard Dr. Rivera yawn. Somewhere, locked in the transparent liquid sitting on the surgical table were her killers, waiting. Another long hour passed.

Flicker, flicker, flicker.

"All right, Meade, we're doing just great. Ready for another?"

"Yes," I said. The cold slivered through my arm as Dr. Ewanalara pressed in another injection.

Flashes.

Blood.

Screaming.

Terror.

Ohmygodnopleasedon'tohjesuspleasepleasedon't!

There were two men. Marrisa had known one of them. She named him and gave their descriptions through my mouth. They beat her. They tied her up. They raped her. They killed the bird. They raped her again. They tortured her. They stabbed her.

They stabbed her.

I could feel it all.

They stabbed me.

Ohpleasenononoohgodnopleasestopno . . .

They stabbed me.

They stabbed me.

The sheets on the table were soaked with sweat. The nurse standing over me looked pale behind her mask. The anesthesiologist wiped my forehead with a red-striped cloth towel. His hand was shaking. I looked at the dots of light reflecting from his watchband, feeling somehow detached, floating.

"Meade," Dr. Ewanalara was saying softly.

I licked my lips, feeling how dry they were, little cracks of skin. "Sorry," I said, my voice sounding far away. My throat hurt. I'd been screaming. "That's all. It's gone."

They waited patiently. I hadn't heard Clint leave the room, but I knew by now the name and the descriptions I'd relayed were being run down. The men would be arrested, and their blood type compared to the semen left behind on Marrisa's body. Now that forensics had a solid lead to go on, every bit of physical evidence would be gleaned with meticulous care, anything to nail the two firmly to Marrisa's murder and possibly to those of her three predecessors.

The blood pressure cuff on my arm hissed and tightened.

"What's her pressure now?"

"130 over 95. Heart rate's going down, too," Dr. Rivera said. The resident stared fixedly at Sam's equipment, looking vaguely ill.

They waited. I stared at the convex lights above me, seeing in the distorted image that I'd completely knocked the paper cap from my head, a mass of dark hair curling everywhere.

I cleared my throat. "How many more?" I asked.

I heard the rustle of his paper gown as Dr. Franklin turned to count the remaining syringes. "Twenty-seven," he said.

"Great." Only a few more hours.

"115 over 75," Dr. Rivera informed him quietly.

"Ready, Meade?"

I was a professional. "Let's do it." We would complete the Retrieval, culling any and all information we could from the remaining extractions: Marrisa Valencia spoke fluent Spanish. She played piano. She had wanted to be a dancer. The man came in to the store. She loved birds. She was out of eggs

and milk again. He called her a *fucking cunt* and made a scene. The car payment was due on the 17th. She's had a crush on a boy she worked with named Jackie. She was halfway through a cheap romance novel. She was mildly promiscuous. Mr. Amboyd, her boss, told her not to worry, the man was just an asshole blowing smoke. She had a crescent-shaped scar on her shoulder where she had been burned with a hot skillet during a fight with her mother years ago. The rent was late again. Daddy's coffin had looked like a big, shiny boat, and she had dreamed about him sailing away to Heaven, leaving her behind and crying since she was nine. She was making a cover for Buster's cage so he wouldn't throw so much seed around.

Marrisa Valencia lived out the rest of her shattered memories and then died.

I was totally exhausted. Hands lifted me up from the table onto a transport bed, and I felt the vibrations as I was rolled out of the OR, Dr. Ewanalara and the nurse beside me. I was assisted into a bed in a private room. A floor nurse wiped my posterior with alcohol and gave me a burning shot of Demerol. Soon I felt warm and fuzzy and floating, with only ghost memories of Marrisa Valencia flickering into oblivion as I slept.

When I woke, the sun was shining through the yellow curtains in the window, and the air held a tang of morning crispness. There were flowers left on the nightstand. I smiled. I knew that they were from Clint. It was a good Retrieval. Marrisa Valencia's killers wouldn't walk from this one.

Dr. Franklin was making rounds, his wrinkled green scrubs exchanged for a freshly pressed white lab coat over an impeccably tailored suit. He sat on the edge of my bed, his fingers curling around my wrist to feel my pulse.

"So how are you feeling this morning?" he asked.

"Fine." I assured him. "Really."

He placed his stethoscope in his ears and listened to my heart and lungs. It repelled me to be touched, but I recognized that this reaction was a carryover from Marrisa Valencia's experience, not mine. It would fade and be gone in a few days.

"Quite a day, yesterday," Dr. Franklin said, trying to make conversation.

"My thirty-seventh Retrieval," I said. I fingered the tiny white patch on my arm among the multitude of small white scars. "Like the notches on the handle of a gun." The joke fell flat.

He glanced at me and put his stethoscope back into his lab coat pocket. "I don't think I could do it."

"Not a lot of people can. You could always take the Special Services exam." I shrugged.

"That's not what I meant," he said. I knew it wasn't what he meant. "I don't think I could go through that thirty-seven times. Not that."

"There are a lot of men in Special Services who make Retrievals on men who've been murdered."

He stared at me in concern. "What you go through is a lot more than mur-

der."

It might have been funny, but I didn't feel much like laughing. "You're making the same mistake that everyone makes," I said. "*I* wasn't raped and tortured and killed. Marrisa Valencia was. Even her memories of it are gone now. As far as I'm concerned, all *I* remember is the Retrieval itself. It's like waking up knowing I've had a bad dream without being able to recall all the details. Memories of memories. There aren't thirty-seven people living on inside my head. Just me, all by myself."

He listened, trying to understand. "Still, if you have any problems, let us know."

"I will. Listen, is Dr. Gaffney here today?"

"He's on call. Would you like to see him?"

I nodded. "Yeah."

Dr. Franklin stood, brushing imaginary wrinkles from his lab coat. "I'll let the nurse know," he said, smiling cheerfully, and left.

I napped. I ate lunch. I watched daytime television. Hospitals are boring.

"Meade?"

Dr. Gaffney peered around the door. When I smiled in greeting, he popped inside. He was a tall, thin man with bright blue eyes above an incredible Semitic nose.

"Having trouble with ghosting?" he asked, his entire face twinkling at me.

He referred to a problem common to Retrievers. One's own brain would form memories of the xenogram experience and would be haunted with disjointed fragments of memories flitting through the mind like bad moods. Sometimes more transference memories would be formed than an otherwise stable Retriever could sort through, and confusion resulted. Whose memories are these?

"No," I said, "not on this one yet."

He sat down, crossing stick-thin legs as he got out his notebook and pen. He never wrote in it, at least not during a consultation, as I'd discovered from past sessions. It was simply something for his hands to do while he listened.

"Not yet? Think you might have some problems later?"

"This one was pretty bad," I admitted. I rubbed my fingers under my eyes, sweeping across my cheekbones. "I must look terrible."

"You look fine," he said.

"You've talked to Clint." I made it a statement rather than a question.

He leaned back in the chair, bouncing the tip of his pen up and down on the blank page. "Yep," he said finally.

"So? What did he say?"

"I think it's more important what *you* say."

"Cut the crap, Ted," I flared. "Don't play Freud with me today. I'm not in the mood, okay?"

He laughed, a short little chuckle. "He says he thinks you might be going through another burnout," he said. "*Now*, what do you say?"

I shrugged one shoulder up defensively. "Maybe."

He doodled small circles on the page and made crosses through the centers. "You're finished with this case for now. It'll take at least a month before you'll have to testify. When you're discharged this afternoon, why not go on a short vacation somewhere and relax? Get out of the city. Go someplace fun, meet some new people."

"I'm not too fond of people right now," I argued.

"Okay," he said, unfazed. "Then go visit your folks if you don't want to go anywhere. Nice, quiet family visit in the old neighborhood."

"Mom's been having some health problems lately. I don't want to saddle them if I start ghosting."

"Bullshit," he rebuffed gently. "Clint talked to your folks last week, and Sally told him you don't get home enough as it is. So if you're going to sit there and 'yes but' me, I'll put you on a mandatory leave of absence."

"Bastard," I said, but there was no anger in my voice. I was fond of Ted Gaffney. And he was right.

"Yep," he agreed cheerfully. "So how 'bout we just sit and talk a bit now, all right?"

So I told him about Mrs. Valencia and how I had felt about her. I told him about the Retrieval and how I'd felt practically no empathy for the girl. I talked about the breakup I had had two months ago from a man who loved me, but couldn't handle me or the self-destructive stress I'd placed on our relationship. I talked about my family and how I had reacted to their loving concern by growing more and more distant from them. I talked about the alienation I was feeling toward everyone and, worse of all, toward myself.

Retrieval was more than simply having an adaptable brain. It was a talent. Very few people had the ability to absorb horrible memories, to relate them accurately and intelligibly through the last moments of a murder. It took a special kind of strength to hold on to one's own personality while being bombarded with the substance and essence of another human being's mind and retain autonomy once the memories had died. Even the strongest get tired.

I was tired.

"Okay," Ted said finally after listening patiently and scribbling on his pad. "I'm going to prescribe the same thing you had last time. Three times a day with meals. And you *will* voluntarily take at least two weeks off, got that? I don't want to see your face around here. But if you feel you need to talk, pick up the phone." He bounced the pen against his palm. "If you go to Hawaii again, remember to reverse the charges this time and tell Shirley to put it on your County expenses, not your private insurance, okay?"

I did feel better than I had in months. Hawaii did sound good. After Ted left, I called the airline from the hospital room phone and booked a flight on

the sunrise express to Honolulu. Then I called my mother and talked for an hour and a half.

The house was cold by the time I got home that evening. It was crazy weather in this city: hot and dusty during the day, and temperatures plummeting to near-freezing almost immediately after the sun set. I got out the luggage and started packing, humming. I stopped and examined myself, thinking carefully. The tune was from my own memory, not Marrisa Valencia's. Assured, I finished one suitcase and started the other, humming away.

The television news report was going in the background when the doorbell rang. There was conflict in Botswana again, and the political climate was still pessimistic in some South American country. Eleven people died in a hotel fire in Boston, and in the local news, our city's councilman was being indicted on charges of campaign contribution fraud. Marrisa Valencia was yesterday's news. I'd been in the hospital and missed it.

I opened the door, expecting Clint, and was surprised to see Mrs. Valencia standing shivering on the steps. She wore an overly large sweater, and her hair, no longer bound in curlers, had been lacquered up in a style common to her age and background. I could see she had been crying, even through the heavy makeup.

"Hello, Mrs. Valencia," I said, discomforted.

"Ms. Hutchinson," she said, abrupt, rude. "May I come in?"

I hesitated, uncomfortable. Something about the woman — the extremity of her emotions, the anger and hostility she radiated — repelled me. "I'm curious as to how you know where I live," I accused her, trying to regain my footing by being equally as rude. "My address isn't public information."

"I followed you from the hospital," she said, her voice flat and unapologetic. "I came and waited. After they took me to see Marrisa. After they took out her brains. I just want to talk to you. It won't take long."

Again, feeling guilty, I repressed my dislike and let her into the house.

"What can I do for you, Mrs. Valencia?"

She sat perched on the edge of my sofa, gingerly clutching a large vinyl handbag to her. The soft plush burgandy under her contrasted sharply with the dirty worn couch I'd seen in her tiny house.

"You remember things like you was Marrisa?" she asked.

Christ. The woman was hoping to hang on to her dead daughter through me. My shoulders slumped slightly.

"No, Mrs. Valencia," I said, trying to be tolerant. "I had a brief form of contact with your daughter's memories, but they're gone now, too."

The older woman looked haggard, hunched on the sofa, but her gaze bore into me with dogged determination. "You sayin' you can't remember nothing about Marrisa?" she persisted. Her voice came out in a grating sound of menace I found oddly familiar.

"Mrs. Valencia," I tried hard to find a way to make this woman understand, "I can remember . . . *remembering* . . . but that isn't Marrisa's memo-

ries or her thoughts. They're mine."

"That mean you took them things in Marrisa's head and turned them into your own?"

It was hopeless. "What is it you'd like to know?"

She leaned forward, clutching her handbag possessively to her waist. "I want you to tell me if my daughter was sleeping around with men," she demanded.

The hostility in her tone sent butterflies nervously tingling my skin. There was an almost palpable tension between her and me, and I began to feel alarmed. "Mrs. Valencia," I tried to reason with her, "it hardly matters anymore."

"It matters," she said grimly, her eyes glittering. "It matters a great deal."

"Marrisa is *dead*," I insisted. "What good is it —"

"I gotta *know*!" the woman shrilled, her voice rising raggedly. "Was she whoring around? Did she sin with them two who killed her!"

"Mrs. Valencia," I said, "everything I remember through your daughter is on a videotape. I'm sure that if you go to the district attorney, he'd show you the tape."

"No," she hissed, angry, "I want to know from *you*. I want to hear it out of your mouth. I want to know from Marrisa. She's my daughter; you got her in there, inside you. You make her come out. You make her confess her sins before God, or her immortal soul will be damned to Hell for all eternity."

This woman was seriously unhinged. I stood carefully, reaching slowly for the phone, feeling prickly with fear. *Clint*.

"Let me call a friend of mine. He'll get the tape and bring it over. Marrisa is on that tape, Mrs. Valencia, not in me. Everything you want to know is on it. We'll play it for you right here, tonight. Would you like that? Can I have him bring the tape over?"

There was fury in her face as she leapt to her feet. Her hand stabbed into the handbag, and she pulled out a small black revolver. "Don't go humorin' me, girl," she said, her eyes narrowed, pointing the gun at me. "You're trying to make a fool out of me. I ain't a fool. I'll *make* you confess if I have to kill you to do it."

I ran my tongue across my lips nervously, sitting back down, my hands falling away from the phone, away from help, into my lap. I stared into the black hole of the revolver's barrel.

"Now," she said, still standing, "You tell me. Was my daughter whoring around. *Tell me*!"

Ghosting.

Slapping. Punching. Screaming obscenities. Accusations. Being forced to sleep in a locked closet. Thin and hungry from fasting. Weeping. Knees swollen and bleeding from hours of kneeling in punishment on a hard wood floor, praying for Jesus to forgive us our sins. Beatings for looking at a boy. Beatings for showing too much leg. Threats to keep quiet. I hated this

woman. I was *terrified* of this woman.

"Not really," I tried, shivering uncontrollably.

"What the hell kind of answer is 'not really'? How many? How many men did she fornicate with?"

"I don't know. Some. I don't know how many."

"Did she whore with them that killed her?"

"One. She knew one of them." I said, still paralyzed by the revolver. "She'd broken up with him."

"It was her fault!" Mrs. Valencia wailed, "She brought down the wrath of the Lord for her sinful ways! She caused it to happen! It was her fault, *her* fault!" She was shrieking, the gun wavering in her hand.

"No one brings that kind of thing on themselves, Mrs. Valencia! It was not her fault!" It was an effort to force myself to stay calm.

She was bawling now. "It *was* her fault! If she'd been a good girl, this would never have happened. I tried! I tried to make her a good girl, but she was disobedient! She defied me, she never listened to me! She made them do it! She did!"

It was getting uncontrollable. I wanted to scream. "Your daughter *was* a good girl!" I insisted. "She played piano in church, remember? All the lessons you paid for? She played beautifully. She had a good job and went to work every day. She wasn't lazy. She was honest and good-hearted. Remember Buster? She loved her parakeet and took good care of him. Uncle Pablo gave me Buster. I *was* a good girl, Mamma, believe me!"

The gun had stopped weaving as Mrs. Valencia listened, getting hold of herself. Her head was bobbing in an irregular way as she stepped closer to me, peering at me through glassy, red-rimmed eyes.

"You remember all that?" she said, her tone suddenly flat and low, eerily calm. "What else? What else do you remember?"

I shook my head, unsure of what she wanted.

"You tell me, did she love me? You make her tell me," she begged hoarsely. "*Marrisa, tell me the truth*!"

I'd made a bad mistake. I didn't have Marrisa inside me. Marrisa was gone. All of the memories I had were of my own Retrieval and a handful of unreliable ghost fragments. I simply couldn't turn on this woman's dead daughter and come up with the answers she wanted. I didn't know. I looked at Mrs. Valencia, trying desperately to see Marrisa's mother, and only saw a half-crazed woman with a gun.

"Yes, Mamma," I lied, "I love you."

Her face contracted in on itself weirdly. "Shut up! Shut up! You lying, fucking whoring bitch!" she screamed at me. She lunged toward me, thrusting the gun out in front of her. I grabbed at it recklessly, missing as she hit my shoulder with it, knocking me off-balance. I staggered away from her, astounded by the ferocity of her attack, unsure whether she was assaulting me or Marrisa.

"*Confess*!" she howled, and pulled the trigger. A flash of yellow light erupted with a loud *pop* from the black end of the barrel, like the shape of a pointed paintbrush. It felt as if I'd been hit in the stomach with a sledgehammer, and a searing pain shot through me, exploding a blinding white light behind my eyes.

Dammit! I thought.

The room turned a greenish hue, and I felt my heart fluttering in my chest in an odd sensation. The carpet was under my hands and knees, but I wasn't sure how I'd fallen. There was blood, warm and dark, running down my legs. Mrs. Valencia was still screaming, but she sounded hollow and very far away. I couldn't make out what she was saying. A rushing sound ran through my ears as the lights faded and I stopped hurting.

I was surprised that there was no pain.

"Kelly," Dr. Ewanalara said on the tape.

"That's it. That's all there was. Sorry," the blonde woman said thickly. Metallic instruments clinked. Dr. Franklin cleared his throat.

"That's okay, Kelly," Dr. Ewanalara said gently. "You did just fine."

14.8.92 [X-REPORT #2-43758849AE]
SEC./M.E. 59375647/14.8.92 17:36
B.P.D./S.S. 6844958AE F./34/D2B
BOYD, KELLY M. (S.R. LIC# 780643)
END REPORT.

The screen popped into a bright red dot in the center, and the picture vanished as the district attorney turned off the set. Clint sat with one hand over his eyes, rubbing slowly against his forehead. The chief of police sighed in the silence, a long exhalation through her nose.

"We picked her up this morning for questioning as soon as we got word from County," she said. "We waited for the tape before charging her. She's not talking without a lawyer."

The DA nodded. "I've never seen a Retrieval done on a Retriever before," he said, musingly.

Clint looked up. "It was legal and by the book," he said. "It's standard procedure to have a pre-signed consent form in her files."

The DA's eyebrows rose in surprise at Clint's defensive tone. "I wasn't questioning your methods, Lieutenant. We intend to consider this a cop-killing, since it is an agent working for Special Services. It's just . . . well . . . I didn't know it could be done."

He turned to the chief of police. "Charge Mrs. Valencia with first-degree murder. Her defense'll jump all over that, I'm sure. We'll probably be looking at an insanity plea, and from there we can get a plea-bargain to second-degree. At least with a Special Services agent killing we'll do better than a

voluntary manslaughter conviction."

"And justice for all," Clint murmured. The chief of police glanced at him warningly.

The DA twisted in his chair to look out at the smog lying over the city in a brown shroud of haze. Ripples of heat shimmered in the glass of the buildings across from them. The chief of police gathered together papers into a file, tapping them neatly into place.

Clint stood up. "The family hasn't been notified," he said. "If you don't need me anymore . . ."

"Of course," the DA said, not turning from his view.

"Give the Hutchinson's my condolences from the entire department," the chief of police said quietly.

The drive out was shorter than Clint remembered, and as he walked up the neat, trimmed path to the house, he realized his mind had gone blank. He stood helplessly on the porch, unable to think of what to say. He had done this duty so many times, but never for a friend. He knocked on the door, his hand feeling like a lead weight.

Sally Hutchinson opened the door, looking at him in surprise through the wrought-iron screen door. "Clint!" she said, smiling, pleased to see him.

The screen door opened, and Clint felt the cool air of the air-conditioned house wash over his face. He simply stood on the porch, staring at Sally, watching the smile fade from her lips. He realized now what it was Meade had meant.

She had the same haunted look he'd seen so many times before. It was the look of a mother who knows what the man is going to say, even before he speaks, and is prepared to deny it as soon as it is spoken.

EARTHLONGING

by M. Shayne Bell

art: George Barr

The author was raised on a ranch in Idaho. His parents, especially his mother, loved science fiction and read it to him before he could read. He has a B.A. and an M.A. in English from Brigham Young University and now works part-time as production editor of BYU Studies, *the scholarly journal of the university.*

In 1986, he won first place in the Writers of the Future contest, and his story "Jacob's Ladder" was published in volume three of that anthology series. His short fiction has also appeared in Isaac Asimov's Science Fiction Magazine *and* Short Form. *This is his first story sale to* Amazing® Stories.

Nic stopped to pull the veil tighter around his nose and mouth, to adjust the goggles over his eyes. A wind had come up (always from the east, through the canyons off the plains), and biting, stinging sand blew everywhere. He started to run. *What a Christmas Eve*, he thought.

The road wound up a low hill. It took all of Nic's strength to run to the top. He stopped, gasping, behind a boulder and looked back: he had run only forty meters. *I'll never do it*, he thought, *I'll never run here.*

The sandstorm grew more violent. Still short of breath, Nic hurried down the hill to the house. The main door faced south and blocked some, but not all, of the wind. His hand stung in the flying sand when he took off his glove to punch out the number sequence; he quickly put the glove back on. Abruptly the door whisked open. He stepped into the air lock. The door closed behind him.

"Arion!" he muttered. He took off his gloves and shook the sand from them. It would take 750 years to terraform Arion; even then the planet would largely remain the desert he faced daily, the desert he would face forever.

He pressed a button. The pressurization sequence started with a hiss. He sat down. The sudden inrush of thick, rich air always made him dizzy — his mother had even fainted once because of it. He leaned against the wall and pulled the veil and goggles from his face, taking short, quick breaths (as he had been taught) but gradually, hungrily taking deeper, longer breaths.

The air from inside the house smelled of baking cookies or cakes; probably both, he thought, knowing his mother. She had spared no effort (or expense, his father ruefully observed) in trying to make their first Christmas on Arion a good one. Lately, his mother had even seemed happy. Both parents claimed to enjoy the adventure of living on another world. Yet Nic never felt he belonged off Earth.

He wanted to go home.

But home was light-years away. Home was in the mountains with snow and skiing, his friends, track meets in the spring — and air — thick air he did not have to fight to breathe outside the buildings.

His mother flicked on the intercom: "David, Nic, are you both in there?"

"Just me," Nic answered. "Dad's coming later with the other men. They were shutting down the mining-robs and didn't need me anymore, so I walked home."

"In this sandstorm?"

"I'm fine, Mom. The wind didn't start till I was almost here."

"Well, that's good. Hurry in — I've got something to show you."

Hurry in! he thought. His mother knew the pressurization took seven minutes. He peeled off his sandsuit; put it, the goggles, veil, and boots in a locker; pulled on a pair of faded jeans and a white T-shirt torn at the neck. The pressure equalized. The door opened. Nic walked into the house. His mother stood by the kitchen window.

"Are you all right?" she asked.

"The storm's not as bad as it looks. What did you want to show me?"

"My snapdragons," she said, beaming. "One's bloomed — come see."

Nic followed his mother into the greenhouse where she proudly displayed her small row of flowers, one in bloom, the rest in bud.

"In a few weeks the seeds will be ready. I can pay back the neighbors for the starts and seeds they gave us."

"That's nice."

"I think I'll give the first seeds to Mrs. Seidinger. Since she speaks English, she seems like part of the family."

"She does."

"You know, it's funny no one ever brought up snapdragons before. Of course, we were lucky to bring any seeds. I wish they had let us bring more; plants make these houses seem like home."

"They do."

Nic's mother looked up at him, took hold of his arm, led him toward the house. She stopped at the door. "I hope you're not too unhappy here, Nic. I'd be sad if you had stayed on Earth and were alone tonight."

Nic said nothing; he simply stared at the rows and rows of herbs it was his mother's job to grow. She followed his gaze and, after a moment, looked tiredly back up at him. "The chamomile in section L needs misting."

"I'll do it," Nic said.

His mother hurried into the house.

When he was through, Nic walked to the living area (the kitchen, living, and dining areas were one big room), sat down, picked up their monthly copy of the *Arion Report* (something he had read five or six times already). He soon turned it off and walked to the bookviewer. Snapping in the index cartridge, he looked through the list of microfilmed books but found nothing to interest him that he had not read.

"Are your lessons caught up?" his mother asked quietly from the kitchen.

"I sent the last packet off a week ago. I haven't heard back — probably won't till after the holidays."

"It's too bad the radio's off, but the Weather Service didn't expect this storm to last long."

Nic said nothing.

"If you want something to do, I could use your help cutting out the decorations I've drawn."

"All right." He got her materials together and sat down at the kitchen table. His mother had drawn two basic patterns on the colored paper: Christmas trees on the green and stars of Bethlehem on the red. He picked up the scissors and started cutting. "I feel like a six-year-old," he muttered.

"What's that?"

"Nothing."

Three Christmas trees and four stars of Bethlehem later, he put everything away, taped his cutouts on the east wall, and went to his room. He sat

and stared through the window into the hills and mountains behind the house; everything was a blur of red sand in the storm.

Lying back on his bed, he looked at the picture of his running trophies. (The trophies themselves were too heavy, too costly to ship up.) But the picture brought back good memories. His sophomore year, just before leaving Earth, he had won first place in both the 1,500- and the 2,000-meter runs; now he could not run for more than fifty meters and stay conscious. He closed his eyes and listened to the steady rhythm of the sand beating against the house and to the wind.

Sometime later, he woke to Christmas music — the radio was on. The storm was over. Out the window, instead of a red blur of wind-blown sand, the mountains rose stark, jagged, and clear.

He hurried into the living area. His mother sat reading at the bookviewer. "So you finally woke up," she said, smiling. "Your father came while you slept. He took Ben and Maggie over to Apollo to buy things the settlement will need tomorrow. They won't get back till after dark."

Nic said nothing.

"I'm trying to find the Christmas story. Luke, isn't it? We'll want that tonight."

"It's Luke."

"I left cookies on the counter."

Nic picked one up and took a bite. "These are great, Mom. Maybe I can take a few with me when I go up in the mountains."

"Go where — now?"

"There's more than an hour of light left. I'll stay on the path and come back before it gets too dark or cold." He picked up three cookies and started for the door.

"How long will you be?"

"A couple hours — just to the ledge over the sandplains."

"Well, I guess it's all right. Supper should be ready when you get back."

The door closed.

After starting the depressurization sequence, Nic changed into his sandsuit, pulled on his boots, and waited while the air was slowly sucked into the house. He took quicker, shallower breaths as he felt the all-too-familiar, never-satisfied breathlessness return. Finally the door opened. He put on his goggles, the head veil, his gloves, and stepped out.

The wind had died down completely. Nothing stirred. The sun, already touching the tops of mountains in the east, threw deep shadows down the valley. Nic ran to the top of the hill and loped down the other side — spent and disappointed by his effort.

Walking after that, he made his way through the foothills into the barren mountains themselves. The road dwindled to a path that led up a winding canyon. As he worked his way up, Nic was often forced to stop to catch what breath he could. The canyon walls grew narrower and made the sky look

more and more like the painted ceiling of a high-vaulted cathedral.

The canyon grew steeper. It suddenly opened onto a wide shelf of rock. The mountain blocked any view of the settlement. To the east, an abrupt drop fell to the sandplains. Nic walked to the edge and looked out on the sea of dunes blazing deep scarlet in the setting sun.

As the sand darkened, Nic looked up the path. It wound around the mountain and into a valley where there had once been hope of starting an iron mine. But behind him, a seldom-used trail led up to a narrow box canyon; few people walked there more than once. Nic knew it was getting late — that he should be starting back — but he decided to climb to the canyon before leaving the mountain; it was not far.

By the time he reached the canyon, the sun had set. The stars shone brightly. One of Arion's moons had risen in the southwest. To his left, Nic recognized the black remains of a type of colonist ship flown years before. But ahead, set in rock at the head of the valley, rose a shining shaft of white granite. Nic walked to it, knelt, brushed the sand off its base. It read:

IN MEMORY OF THE SIXTY COLONISTS WHO DIED HERE.
THEY HAD HOPED TO MEET THEIR FAMILIES AND WITH THEM
BUILD A NEW LIFE.

A new life — here! Nic thought. *They must not have realized what they were leaving behind.* He lay back on the canyon floor and looked up at the starry paring of sky. A certain constellation had barely risen over the northern rim of the canyon. One of its stars shown bright, steady, and deep yellow; he knew it. He watched the star move slowly up the sky and tried to picture himself under it, in his hometown on Christmas Eve. During the day, he imagined, he would have gone skiing with his friends; he could almost smell the evergreens and his wet, wool cap.

But at this time of night, he thought, he would have been with his family, would have been —

He sat up.

He would *not* have been with his family. His family would have been on Arion. He could not even have heard from them if he had stayed on Earth.

He threw a rock at the canyon wall above the shaft. It knocked loose a thin wisp of sand that flowed over him to the ground. The sand hit his veil softly.

He thought of the times he had felt homesick or lonely: camps, school outings. His friends had been with him then, but they could never replace his family. His family mattered. Being with them mattered. Leaving them would have been harder than leaving Earth. He looked back at the shaft of granite; perhaps the colonists had come knowing what they left behind, but knowing too that who waited for them on Arion mattered more.

He pulled his sandsuit tighter against the chill that crept over his body. Suddenly, with a start, he thought of the temperature. He had seen moon-

rise and had stayed outside.

He hurried through the canyon and down the trail to the shelf over the sandplains. He stood — cold and out of breath — against the rock wall away from the edge. He remembered the three cookies in his pocket, and he ate one for energy, teeth chattering. Both moons were up. The path shone clearly in the moonlight. He broke into a run, and ran with all his strength until he stumbled and fell, fighting for air. After several minutes, he began to feel too comfortable in the cold. He forced himself to stand. He looked back up the trail, at first not comprehending and then amazed: he had run nearly one hundred meters.

He had run on Arion.

He stood, dizzy at first, and stared up the path. "One hundred meters," he whispered.

It could be done.

He leaned back, fighting to catch his breath. He ate part of another cookie. Energy was important — proper diet, proper training. His parents would be surprised — they thought he'd given up. But he had run, without thinking. He could do it. He would train himself to run again. He'd start on the valley floor. He'd try running uphill. He'd have to be careful, study the breathing. Some of the other colonists might start. On Earth, his mother had run: he'd wave when he passed her on the track, or push her along from behind, make her laugh.

The cold began to hurt his face.

He pulled the veil back around his head and made his way off the rock shelf and down the narrow canyon going as fast as the moonlight and his strength allowed. Eventually the path turned to the west. He could see the settlement. One light shone brightly from the valley.

Nic stopped to rest and look up at the star-filled sky. For the first time he felt awed by the clarity and brilliance of the sight; the stars shone with an unflickering splendor and color he could have never known on Earth.

Ready to go on, he stood and looked up again at the light still shining below him. Suddenly he realized what light it was and who it was that waited for him, and he started to run again — home.

SACRAMENT

by Adrian Nikolas Phoenix

art: Janet Aulisio

The author currently works at a science-fiction bookstore in Eugene, Oregon, and like many other writers has held such odd jobs as security guard, nurse's aide, and night manager at a women's shelter. She is also a member of the Pulphouse Writers' Workshop. Finally, between taking care of her two sons, she devotes her time to writing short stories and a novel.

"Sacrament" is her first professional story sale.

Silver leaned his aching body against the bridge's low concrete wall and glanced down at the black waters of the Willamette River. Bright neon reflections shimmered across its surface, and he imagined he saw the hot pink letters of ALL NUDE REVUE dance over the blackness. Maybe he had. Club 69 squatted at the right-hand end of the bridge.

Narrowing his eyes, Silver tried to gauge the distance to the water. He feared the fall wouldn't be enough. He'd heard stories of people who'd jumped from the Golden Gate in Frisco and survived. Maimed, vegged-out, but alive. And this bridge wasn't nearly as high as that one. He touched his jeans pocket, the hard lump of the pocketknife inside reassuring him. Just before he jumped, he would slit his wrists. Then if the fall didn't kill him and he didn't drown, at least he'd bleed to death.

He rubbed sweaty palms back and forth along the mist-sprayed wall, barely feeling the concrete's rough bite. His stomach knotted and he swallowed heavily. Fifteen years old and dying of AIDS. A stupid way to go, it wasn't even noble. His hero, the Silver Surfer, wouldn't have been caught this way. He would have guided his surfboard past the waves of illness and into the cosmos beyond.

Fifteen years didn't seem like a very long time, yet sometimes, like now, it felt more like forever — sucked dry, hollowed out, but still hurting.

Yeah, like fucking forever.

A breeze drifted up from the river, smelling of fish and decay. Its coolness stole some of the fire from his body. Silver closed his eyes. He wished for a place to lie down and sleep.

Tell me a bedtime story, Daddy.

Silver tried to take a deep breath, but coughed instead, and pain lanced through his chest. Weak and soaked in sweat, he sagged against the wall. Once the spasm passed, he eased onto the wall. Straddled it. Winos and transients shuffled past, paying him no mind, the collars of their long, dirty coats turned up against the late April chill. A few yards ahead stood a dark-

haired man wearing a tan windbreaker. He slouched against the wall, his attention on the passing cars.

Satisfied, Silver dug the knife out of his pocket and fumbled it open. He stared at the blade, feeling sick to his stomach, wishing —

What?

That I could go home and that Dad would be like he was before Mom had tossed her things into the old, oil-spitting Dodge and driven into the sunset?

That I could be little again so that a glass of orange juice, two aspirins, and a hug would make the sickness go away? Poof, like magic?

Silver bit into his lower lip, bit until the taste of blood seeped into his mouth. *Now*, he thought, holding the knife above his left wrist. He steadied his shaking hand against his knee. *Now . . .*

A hand seized Silver's right wrist with numbing force. The knife tumbled from his fingers, bounced against the concrete with a sharp *ting* then slid over the edge into the darkness below.

His throat tightened. "Damn it!" Silver swiveled and swung his other leg over the wall. Gritting his teeth, he shoved free of the bridge.

Fingers continued to crush his wrist.

Silver cried out as pain jolted through his shoulder. He slammed against the side of the bridge, its weathered surface scraping the skin beneath his shirt. As though he weighed no more than an empty bottle of Mad Dog, he was yanked back over the wall and tossed onto the sidewalk.

Dazed, Silver crawled to his knees and cradled his throbbing arm against his stomach. He looked up into intense blue eyes. He recognized the windbreaker, the dark hair. Silver was close enough now to see the grey threading both hair and neatly trimmed mustache. The man bent, grabbed Silver's upper arm, and hauled him to his feet.

Heart thudding against his ribs, Silver glanced down at his swollen, purple-marked wrist. He wanted to die, yes, but he didn't want to be murdered. He didn't know which frightened him more, the man's strength or the secrets his strength hinted at. Was he a PCP bone-crusher? A johnny-do-good? A psycho?

"How long have you been ill?" the man asked, voice low and harsh.

Silver stared at him, goose bumps popping up on his arms. How did he know? Then he remembered how he had looked in the mirror that morning. Bluish smudges beneath the eyes, the pallor of his skin. Tired. Remembered his own sour smell.

"How long?" the man repeated.

Silver shrugged, shifting his gaze to the traffic. How long? No way of telling. He'd worked the streets and alleys for the past year, selling himself to men who craved hungry boys in tight jeans. It earned him enough money for a room in a roach-infested hotel, new clothes, food, and comic books. Sometimes he earned enough to go dancing or to see a movie.

So when he woke drenched in sweat, the sheets cold and clammy, and not

for the first time, he hadn't been surprised. He'd known the risks. But he'd hoped it wouldn't happen to him.

Muscles tight with anger, Silver said, "You've done your good deed for the day, so fuck off." He tried jerking free of the man's hold, but failed.

Fingers brushed through his hair. Silver froze. Even the cars seemed to slow, the red glow of their taillights stretching out like wedding streamers.

"Child of the flock, *tha sibh finn*," the man murmured. "Your hair is silver, like the *ban sidhe* — the pale folk — but your eyes are dark."

"Dyed," Silver said, mouth dry. "I dyed my hair. But that's what people call me. Silver, I mean." He closed his eyes, confused by the gentleness of the man's tone and the strangeness of his words. He wanted to lean into the warmth of the hand stroking his hair, to rub against the fingers like a cat. But part of him wanted to hit, kick, punch. To scream.

"You are alone," the man said.

The muscles in Silver's throat constricted. He nodded, not trusting his voice. Yeah, even his friends avoided him. They waved when they passed him on the streets, but their faces were scared. His buddy, Alias, had helped him though.

For when it gets bad, Silver, he'd said, handing him a bottle of pills. Silver had taken them all and had gone to bed. He had spent the next two days throwing up. So much for pills.

Tasting salt on his lips, Silver opened his eyes and touched his face. The wetness he felt there surprised him. He wiped his face dry with the back of a hand.

Crying is for babies. Crying is for wimps. Crying solves . . .

The man's fingers trailed the length of Silver's hair, brushed his cheek, then were gone. The hand on his arm relaxed. Silver looked at him, and something sparked within the stranger's blue eyes. Something that coiled, burning, around Silver's spine.

"I am Cian," the man said. "Chieftan of clan Blood. If you want death, child, I can give it to you without pain." He smiled and his lips pulled back from his teeth.

Silver stared at his teeth, especially the long, slender canines. Too long. Too slender. Curved. Too real to have been bought at Woolworth's. Static filled Silver's ears as though he'd tuned between stations.

A vampire in Portland.

Why not? Silver thought. On the streets, anything was possible. Anything at all. From handing over ten per cent of his nightly earnings to a couple of cops so they wouldn't bust him to free health clinics for the pets of bums and other street-folk to winos lying bloated and buzzing with flies on the sidewalks.

Anything.

An old man stumbled along the sidewalk, reeking of cheap wine and day-old shit. He stopped beside Silver. His lips twitched into a smile, revealing

empty gums. "Hey, pretty," he said. "I can do you real fine. Got no teeth. Only five bucks."

Silver glanced away, nauseated. "No," he said. "No money."

Muttering about punk kids, the old man wandered away. Silver listened to the scrape of his shoes against the pavement.

Yeah, anything is possible here. Anything at all. Anything but life.

"So . . . you're a vampire," Silver said after a moment. "Like in undead? Like in beware of the cross?"

Cian smiled, but this time it was a tight, closed-lip smile. "Vampire is a flock term, *gille finn*. We are the clan. And no, we are not undead."

The hand around Silver's arm tugged, and he stumbled forward. Cian's arms wrapped about him, pulling him into an embrace of heat, hardness, and the faint scent of cinnamon. Cian lifted Silver's hand to his throat. The slow, steady rhythm of Cian's heart pulsed beneath his fingertips. His own heart pounding rapidly, Silver stared at the thick, open-ended twist of gold looped around Cian's neck.

That can't be real. It'd be worth a fucking fortune.

"Forget everything you have read about us or seen on the television," Cian whispered, voice intense. "Forget garlic, coffins, and crosses. Especially the cross. You of the flock lack true understanding of it."

Silver's muscles knotted, and he lowered his hand to his side. "The *flock*, huh? Like in sheep?"

Cian shook his head. "Child, I am both hunter and shepherd."

"Make a meal outta someone else," Silver yelled, face hot. "Don't do me any favors!" He shoved hard against Cian, then winced as pain shot from his wrist to his shoulder. "Damn —" his words ended in a lung-cramping cough. His throat clenched shut. Struggling for air, he doubled over.

Steel-muscled arms spun Silver around. A fist hammered between his shoulder blades. But he continued to choke on the phlegm his lungs spat up. Static buzzed in his ears.

Don't need a river to drown, he thought, vision greying. Then the sidewalk yawned open beneath his feet and swallowed him.

Silver awoke to the rumble of traffic, but the sound of it was wrong. It echoed. He breathed in the odor of mud and dead green things, his chest aching so badly he wondered if Dad had broken a rib this time. He realized he was being held, cradled like a baby. *But Dad wouldn't . . .*

Then he remembered the bridge.

Opening his eyes, Silver struggled to sit up, but a hand pushed gently against his chest.

"Lie still, *gille*."

Anger flared, hot and blinding. Slapping aside Cian's hands, Silver tumbled free of the loose embrace. Pain stabbed his lungs. He knelt, then sat back on his heels, fighting the urge to cough. Mud oozed beneath his knees,

cold and wet even through his jeans.

Silver stared straight ahead. He tried to think of anything but the tickling sensation deep in his chest. The river flowed a few yards away, its sluggish waters slapping against the shore. The moon's pale reflection smudged the water. *Another silver surfer,* he thought with a sudden pang. Glancing up, Silver saw the dark curve of the bridge.

"Why are we under the bridge?" he asked. Cian didn't answer and Silver shivered, suddenly cold despite fever. He swiveled to face the man — *vampire.* "Damn you!" he yelled. "My choice. My goddamned choice! You've got no right to take it from me."

Cian looked at him from where he sat cross-legged in the grass. His blue gaze was steady and, Silver thought, tired. "I haven't taken anything from you. Death is your choice."

"But not like this," Silver said, hugging himself. "I wanted . . . I thought . . ." The words withered in his throat. *Thought what? That by killing myself I would be doing the brave and noble thing — that the Dark Knight, the Silver Surfer, and the Green Lantern would gather in some dark alley and speak of me in hushed tones. Nodding their heads and gazing at the stars.*

A man of honor, *the Green Lantern said.*

He fought long and hard, *the Silver Surfer said.*

But they got him. *Whirling, the Dark Knight walked from the alley, his cape billowing behind him.*

Silver dropped his gaze to the ground, throat tight. Heat rushed to his cheeks. *Yeah, right. So stupid.* He knew there would be no gathering of heroes, no never-never land of play all day, of eat candy all night. No place where parents held hands, and there were no black eyes or broken ribs or shattered hearts. His stomach twisted. All it amounted to was jumping off a bridge like an idiot or dying alone beside a dumpster, garbage for the rats to chew on. Or . . . letting a vampire in jeans and windbreaker suck him dry.

His heart hammered so hard against his ribs that he feared that Cian would see it. It leaped within his chest like some demented alien trying to burst free. He drew in several slow, shallow breaths, longing to breathe more deeply but afraid to. After a few minutes, he felt calm enough to speak. "If I choose, will I become a vampire too?" *Will I be well,* was the unspoken thought.

"I don't know," Cian replied, his voice dropping to a near whisper. "I haven't witnessed a birth in nearly fifty years."

Silver glanced up at him. Fifty years? Cian looked to be in his late forties. Just how *old* was he? "But I thought . . ." he stammered. "I mean, in the movies —"

"I told you to forget all that." Cian stood, crossed the short distance between them, and knelt before Silver. "You have a hard head, *gille,*" he said. He tugged at the edge of Silver's hair. "Despite what you believe, I sense strength within you and a warrior's instinct for survival — one not limited to

just this plane."

Silver stared at him, trying to make sense of his words. "Does that mean yes?" he asked.

"Only the clan priests can answer that," Cian replied with a shrug. "It is still a mystery."

A horn blared overhead, instantly followed by the screech of brakes. Silver glanced at the bridge. *Must have missed each other*, he thought when he didn't hear the crunch of impact.

"And if the choice was life?" Cian asked, the intensity of his voice yanking back Silver's gaze. "What then? What would you do?"

Silver chewed on his lower lip, not sure he understood. Cold twisted his guts. "Do?" he repeated a moment later. Cian nodded, eyes glittering. Silver glanced away, mouth dry. Cian's expression had been too much like that of a wolf's he'd seen in a zoo long ago: a hungry, restless stare. Penetrating. Only this time no concrete wall separated them. Silver's muscles coiled. He focused his thoughts, searching for an answer.

What *would* he do? Emotions surged through him, too many and too entangled to name. He knew he wouldn't go home. The hurt would be too much. Closing his eyes, Silver remembered his last night at home. *Home? Bad word for something so damned empty*, he thought. *Like Mom had yanked the soul from it when she split.* His father slept sprawled on the sofa, mouth open. His worn brown belt lay like a snake on the floor beside him, the buckle's prong a single sharp fang.

Silver watched him from the kitchen. The pungent reek of rum stung his nostrils. His stomach lurched, queasy with pain and swallowed blood. He eased down along the wall to the floor, avoiding the shattered remains of the Ron Rico bottle. As pain pulsed through him, he wished he'd never snatched it from his father's hand. Wished he'd left well enough alone. He glanced at his father. Thought of digging a knife out of the drawer and crawling to the sofa. Thought of curling beside him and crying, "Daddy!" Even thought of searching out his mother and using the knife on *her. I can understand why you left him, Mom. But why me? Why the hell did you leave me with him?* Words echoed through Silver, words his father had spat before laying into him with fists and belt.

You make me do this, boy. You're just not happy until I've knocked the crap out of you. Damn you.

Silver's eyes flew open. His body clenched tight as a fist. He struggled for breath. Something tore loose inside and, before he could stop it, spilled from his lips and into the night. "No!" he screamed. "That's a lie! I never wanted that. Goddamn you to fucking hell, I *never* wanted *that*!"

Cian's arms wrapped about him and Silver fought the embrace. Kicking and swinging his fists wildly, he continued to scream long after he'd run out of words. He knuckled blow after blow into Cian's body. But the man's hold never loosened. Finally, coughing and gasping for breath, Silver sagged

against Cian. He felt drained. Limp.

Cradled once again upon Cian's lap, Silver listened as the chieftain murmured words in a language he didn't recognize. The smooth sound of his voice soothed like a lullabye. Silver watched the sky, hoping to see the fiery streak of a falling star. The sky remained still. He blinked away sudden tears. *There are no superheroes*, he thought. *Only survivors*.

"If I had a second chance," Silver said, voice hoarse, "I'd learn to fight back. To live." He swallowed heavily. "Surviving ain't enough." Glancing up, he met Cian's gaze.

A warm smile curved Cian's lips. Intensity flared within his blue eyes, then vanished. "Well answered," he said.

Realizing how sleepy he was, Silver rested his head against Cian's chest. The slow thud of Cian's heart lulled him, and he wished he could stay within the circle of his arms forever.

Tell me a bedtime story, Daddy.

"What did you mean on the bridge?" he asked. "About the cross?"

Cian sighed and shifted, his jacket rustling beneath Silver's cheek. Again, Silver smelled cinnamon. "Ah, *gille*, so many questions. Is it so important?"

"Yes," Silver whispered. He didn't want to sleep yet. *Just a few more minutes.*

Cian's fingers trailed over Silver's throat, tickling. Heat rushed to Silver's face. Bewildered, he closed his eyes.

"All right, then," Cian murmured. "Nearly two thousand years ago, *gille* — long before my time, but during the time of my clan mother — a young man devout in the faith of his people went into the wilderness outside Judea seeking wisdom. He found it in the form of clan Manna and was reborn. He dwelt in the desert for years learning clan ways and delving into the mysteries of self and god.

"Several things became clear to him. The history of the clans was as long and violent as that of their prey. If any were to survive, the clan feuds had to stop. Control needed to be taught to clans bound by the tides of sun and moon. The flock needed to be cared for and cultivated. Compassion and control, even during the hunger of the Hunt. So in order to bridge the gap between shepherd and hunter, he gave us the Sacrament of Bonding.

"This is my blood, drink," Cian whispered. "This is my body, taste."

Silver stared at Cian, stunned.

"You know what eventually happened," Cian said. "Many of the clans refused to give up the old ways. They believed it would make them less. Weak. The flock misinterpreted everything. Between the two he was betrayed and crucified."

"But . . . that can't be," Silver said, mouth dry once again. "He came back. He rose from the dead."

Cian smiled. "The near-dead, you mean. Since the spear hadn't pierced a vital organ and hadn't remained in his body, he healed himself. Regener-

ated. But it took three days. Once his strength returned, he left to spread the word among the clans dwelling among other nations. His teaching took root with time."

Silver stared at the river. A campfire glowed orange and yellow on the other side of the night-blackened waters. He thought of the people huddled around it to warm their bodies before sleeping. The cold, hard ground would suck it away again. And more. Silver glanced away, remembering his first nights in the city.

"Is he still alive?" he asked. He felt Cian shrug.

"It's been said he died two centuries ago," Cian said. "In Venezuela, perhaps Brazil." His fingers sifted through the hair at Silver's temple.

"Cian, is it always this way with you?" Silver asked through lips gone cold. "The way you've been with me, talking and all that?"

"No," Cian murmured. "No *gille*. This is . . . different."

"Why?" Silver looked at him. Something close to anguish lined the chieftain's face. Silver's chest tightened.

"I wish to be shepherd, once," he said.

"Will my blood make you sick?"

"No."

"What happens if I survive?"

"Then you will be welcomed into the clan as my son."

As his son. Silver found he could breathe again. He looked into Cian's eyes and his doubts slid away. *One chance. One last chance.* "I think I want to sleep now," he said.

"So be it," Cian said, voice husky. He leaned forward and traced a cross on Silver's forehead. "Close your eyes, *gille*."

Silver closed his eyes and tilted his head back. His body rocked with each pulse of his heart. Cian's warm breath touched his throat, a wet flick of his tongue, then a sting as teeth pierced his skin.

Within minutes, Silver drowsed. He listened to the quiet sound of Cian swallowing and wondered if being sick made his blood taste different. Dizziness whirled into him then left. Only the cold remained. He knew he needed to do something — *anything* — to help bring about the mystery Cian had spoken of, but didn't know what. He was too tired, too comfortable to focus his thoughts. He drifted away from his numbed body.

Death is like hiding under a bed, he thought. *Full of cold and dark and waiting.*

What is heaven like? Memory flickered, traced backward, and Silver heard himself asking the same question of his mother, his voice too low and anxious for eight years old.

It's a place where it is sunny all day and there's no bedtime, she murmured, voice husky from cigarettes. *And you can do whatever you want. Fly. Laugh. No one to tell you that you can't.*

Fly? Like Superman?

Yeah, hon, like Superman. In heaven there are no clogged drains, no whiskey. Her eyes took on the flat, distant look that told Silver she no longer saw him. His stomach knotted. He wished he could cup heaven in his hands and give it to her. Maybe then she would see him.

There are no mirrors in heaven, she said. *Nothing to reflect the bitterness of a child grown old.*

Mama? Mama, where is heaven? He curled his fingers around hers and squeezed. The distance remained in her gaze.

Why it's just across the horizon, honey. At the end of I-5.

Silver clutched at the blackness surrounding him, trying to tug it over him like a blanket. Instead, his fingers tore through it. Light shafted over him. He fell, pinwheeling through a maze of light and shadow. A voice called to him.

SILVER.

Cian's cinnamon scent whirled about him. *And if the choice was life?* The words vibrated through Silver's chest, the voice coming from within, yet not his own. *What then?*

Then I'd live! he cried soundlessly. His gut-twisting plunge stopped. Eyes squeezed shut, he waited for pain or the nothingness of complete death. Neither occurred. He opened his eyes. He stood balanced upon a silver surfboard. Beneath him, a white-frothed green sea tumbled against the face of a rock-stewn cliff. Rain slanted across the horizon, a thin grey veil at the world's edge.

Moving carefully, Silver knelt upon the wide surfboard and ran his hands over its smooth, solid surface. He smiled. *Real*, he thought. Butterflies swirled through his stomach. *Real.*

SILVER.

The voice sounded garbled as though the speaker were underwater. Silver glanced down at the churning waves. His scattered thoughts gathered, narrowed into one. He knew what he had to do. Silver stood. The surfboard dipped briefly but otherwise remained steady. Wind gusted cold against him. Shivering, he regarded the long drop to the sea. He clamped his lips together. All he had to do was step forward. And pray that somewhere beneath the heaving green waves Cian would catch him.

I said I'd learn to fight back. But I might need some help at the start.

He paused at the edge of the hovering board and breathed deeply. The smells of salt, rain, and wet rock filled his lungs.

SILVER, COME FORTH.

May heaven stay forever across the horizon, Silver thought, stepping forward. Pain lashed around his ankle as he did, and yanked him backward. The surfboard tilted crazily beneath him. Falling, Silver grabbed its gleaming edge with his hands. Cold sliced into his palms. Blood, warm and thick, trickled down his wrists and along his forearms. He stared, feeling more betrayed than hurt.

Silver threw a glance over his shoulder. His father stood at the cliff's edge, a long brown whip clenched in his hand. The whip stretched beyond the cliff and out . . .

Silver looked at his ankle. Coils of worn leather were wrapped around it. The scratched buckle with its single, sharp prong bit into the skin just above his sock. Silver choked back a scream. Sweat popped out on his forehead as his blood-slickened fingers slipped. He couldn't plunge into the sea dragging his father behind him like an anchor. He would never find the surface again. Would never find Cian's mystery.

Silver hauled himself onto the surfboard and laid there, trembling with more than just cold and strain. His stomach churned. The bitter taste of bile burned the back of his throat. Swallowing heavily, he struggled against the sickness writhing within him. And lost.

I hate you, you son of a bitch, Silver screamed. He felt the cords in his neck tighten and bulge. *I hate you! Hate you*!

The coils constricted about his ankle until all feeling had fled his foot. His breath rattled in and out of his lungs. A sick heat raged through him. Tugging at the belt-whip, his father reeled him in like some big, dazed fish.

Silver clutched at the sides of the surfboard as it jerked backward. He knew that the moment he reached the cliff he would be dead. No more dreams. No more hiding under the bed. No more chances. Just dead. He stared at the dull gleam of the board, tears blurring his vision. *So much for fighting back*, he thought. *I didn't do so hot, huh*? Blood smeared the board's surface. He glanced at his hands. The bleeding had nearly stopped.

This is my blood —

From beneath the green waves Cian called to him again, but this time his voice sounded flat and desperate.

IN THE NAME OF THE SHEPHERD, SILVER, COME FORTH!

This is my blood, Silver thought, resting his forehead against cool metal. *Drink. And thanks anyway.*

The surfboard jerked backward.

You make me do this, his father said (thought? dreamed?), the words gusting against Silver like the wind. *I don't want to, but damn it, boy, you just won't be happy until I've —*

— knocked the crap out of me, I know, Silver finished for him.

If only you'd stayed little. If only you still needed bedtime stories.

But I did! I do. But you weren't listening anymore. Or telling. Silver glanced over his shoulder. The expression on his father's guilt-and-rum-ravaged face squeezed his heart. Silver looked away, his fingers white-knuckled and bent like claws at the board's edge. He'd seen that expression before — countless times. He'd seen it on his own face in the bathroom mirror beneath the purplish bruises and split lips. The expression was one of hurt, anger, and bewilderment.

And fear.

I'm the only thing he has left to punish himself with, he thought with sudden clarity. He also realized there were more ways to fight back than just fists and harsh words.

If only you hadn't crossed the horizon, his father sighed.

That was Mom. She sacrificed us both. Silver's throat ached. *For heaven. Daddy, I forgive you. Okay? I do. Please, Daddy, please read me a bedtime story.*

The belt-whip slithered away from his ankle. Without looking, Silver knew his father was no longer on the cliff. He forced his fingers loose from the surfboard and tumbled off and into the sea.

Water surged over him. His body tingled as green splashed through his veins, cooling the ache in his joints, soothing the tightness from his chest.

Sinking . . .

Silver became aware that he no longer hurt, that he could breathe easily . . . breathe? He no longer felt sick, the rancid taste gone from his tongue. Gone with the past. Gone with his father.

Silver.

"Silver?"

Forcing his eyes open, Silver winced at the brightness that flooded them. He blinked in confusion. It was still night! Yet he saw as clearly as if it were day. Above him, traffic rumbled over the bridge. He looked at Cian. Wetness glistened on the chieftain's cheeks.

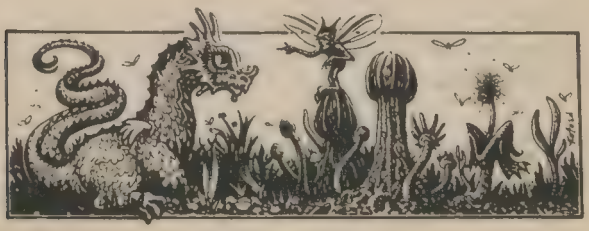
"Cian?" Silver whispered. He tried to wipe the tears from Cian's face, but his hand was too heavy.

Cian hugged him close, burying his face in Silver's hair. After several minutes, he stood, Silver cradled against his chest. The windbreaker's zipper scratched Silver's cheek, but Silver was too sleepy to care.

"To the clan, *gille*."

As his son, Silver thought as sleep claimed him. *God, so much to learn . . . to unlearn . . .*

He dreamed that under the dark curve of a bridge three superheroes gathered to share word of a battle won. ❁



the ghost of Andy Warhol

the ghost of Andy Warhol walks tonight;
he is, in death, finally albino,
and he has mastered laughter.

i have seen him. his gaunt
has grown maniacal,
and grand. his is, for the moment,
a malleable reality.

he appeared to me at a Tommy Rettig retrospective,
during a screening of
The Five Thousand Fingers of Dr. T.
between
reruns with the dog.

i bought him popcorn. while he ate
he seemed to flicker in and out of existence.
he explained to me
that the soul's allotment of ectoplasm
lasts so long and no longer —
minutes at most —
and that existential flickering can extend
the duration of an apparition
and provide an economy whereby
an illusion of continuity may be maintained
while extending the real-time presence
of the ectoplasmic construct . . .

he left before things turned atomic —
his time is short and he
has miles to keep
before — sometime tonight —
he disappears for good.

it's like he said.
everybody's a phantasm for 15 minutes.

— W. Gregory Stewart

IN HIS LIKENESS
by Phillip C. Jennings
art: Brad W. Foster

Phillip C. Jennings tells us: "My knowledge of England stems from spending the summer of 1983 in London and the south counties, with a copy of Egon Ronay's Pub Guide in hand. The Affrack River and the villages of Market Caldriff and Yettings Over correspond to some places which I've transferred to the North Sea coast, to protect the inhabitants' secrets. The cider was wonderfully potent, and British pints are big, *so I'm not sure I got everything down precisely the way it was told, but Anglican vicars wouldn't lie, now, would they?"*

If you say so, Phil; if you say so.

The world was awash in yellow sunshine, and the station sign was half obscured by hanging flower baskets. MARKET CALDRIFF it read, and after descending to the platform, the angular young reverend nodded at this confirmation. Letting his luggage drop, he looked at his watch, and then raised his eyes to the church belfry beyond the tiny station, no great distance away.

Norman-style to his educated eye, and not far, even with his present burden of two suitcases. Cars shivered, couplings jerked, the train got under way again and was soon gone. With a sigh the Reverend Richard Enrick began the trek, trying not to think ungenerous thoughts about the local vicar.

Cricket field to his right, gravestones huddled to his left, Richard struggled on until he stood at the worn steps of Tamas-le-Martyr. Just at that moment he heard a genteel honk and the crackle of tires on gravel as a yellow convertible rolled up behind him. "Father Enrick?"

"Well, yes."

The man's collar confirmed him as the tardy vicar. He was ruddy and plump, and he rose in his car, settling down again after a quick, foam-rubber handshake. "Glad to meet you, padre. I'm Walter, Walter Scourd. This is my bit here, south of the Affrack. You'll be taking up directly north. Neighbors. Care for a tour?"

This far from Cornwall, yet Vicar Scourd retained a Cornish accent, while his vocabulary hinted at a taste for things American: movies or books. "Did the bishop tell you I was coming?" Richard asked.

"That's right. Sorry to be late, had a baptism service to work out. Get in, then. Just park your bags in the back. Let's see the sights. Unless you're thirsty? Good cider here at the Two Uncles, but quite potent if you're not used to it."

"Oh, I think not. I'd best not show up at St. Kitts with tainted breath."

"Um." Reverend Scourd nodded with odd restraint. He wheeled left. Most of Market Caldriff lay the other way, so soon they drove among fields and hedgerows. "Ours are Christians, too, at the Uncles. I'm afraid we refer to the river Affrack as the Iron Curtain — solid Labour to the north, and not much for a congregation. Ah, here: canal. Hurst Hornet up ahead. I've got Market Caldriff, Hurst Hornet, and everything east along Ponterry Road as far as Twinders. You'll be in charge of the two Yettings: Yettings Over and Yettings Nether — Moscow and Leningrad. St. Kitts is in Yettings Over, but at least half your congregation is likely to motor in from Toberfinch on Sundays — twittery old ladies in bonnets making their weekly outing. Here."

The car made another left and slowed as it crossed the bridge. "These woods are faery, don't you know? The Liklewood. Druids and communists — I expect you thought you were getting away from the madding twentieth century, coming out to these wilds. Cambridge man? We don't get locals. Locals don't go into the church, and the bishop's against too much inbreeding. Sends Sussex to Wales, and Kent to Yorkshire, always fresh blood. They could use fresh blood up in the Yettings. All cousins, never marry anyone except each other."

Richard broke into this flood of narrative. "There's a place called Pacemarket, an old soldier's home."

"Oh yes. The other pole, politically. Won't get but a few of them into church either. Old Social Darwinist ex-colonials. Fought against our little brown brothers in Malaya and Kenya. Your predecessor at St. Kitts was black: fancy how well *that* went over!"

As Reverend Scourd drove on north the landscape rose and cleared slightly. Hedgerows gave way to intermittent walls of gray, lichenous flagstone. "They call this 'the Farms.' That height over there is Swage Top. Interesting place, queer potholes on the crest. Sort of a plateau with dimples. Cave-ins, I suppose. Anyhow, the view's terrific."

The countryside grew increasingly moorlike and treeless. Swage Top slid to the east as the car continued north. "Yettings Over," Vicar Scourd called out as the village came into sight: low cottages, white with black trim, slate roofs: cottage-like shops distinguished by larger windows. The indefatigable Scourd found his voice again. "St. Kitts just to the west, and St. Kitts Tithebarn next door. Have you thought what to do with the place? Wife? Children?"

"No, just me."

"Thirty rooms, six or seven fireplaces! The parish ought to sell it, turn it into a bed-&-breakfast. Talk about lumbering a man with expenses, and it's not as if St. Kitts is in the black. Of course, if carpentry's your hobby —"

"Actually, it is — Good heavens!"

"What? That woman?"

"The one on the road. What's wrong with her?"

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Vicar Scourd slowed and risked a rearward glance. "Broad in the beam, bowlegged, a local alewife —".

"No, I meant her color. The way her face — oh, never mind."

"Lots of inbreeding here," Scourd repeated. "They all look like that."

For the first time since being saddled with this troubled parish, Reverend Enrick let himself feel properly appalled. "*Wind in the Willows*," he whispered.

"How's that?"

"Biped amphibians done up in costume. Excuse me, that's neither Christian nor particularly generous. Bed-&-breakfast, eh? What about tourism here? Any tourist potential?"

Entering Yettings Over, the car passed a row of cottages, and Scourd signaled a left turn. "A few hikers trekking in across the Westings, and there's your shovel-and-bucket brigade that likes to dig clams in the Frachting Wash at low tide, but they park in Hurst Hornet." He accelerated out of his turn and veered right as the road branched. "Here we go: St. Kitts. I suppose the keys are at the vicarage."

St. Kitts was whitewashed Regency, rebuilt and a century younger than St. Kitts Tithebarn. Reverend Scourd took his car farther up the track, which dwindled into a private drive, a rear access to the overbuilt vicarage. "Quite a pile," Richard muttered as he got out to open the gate.

"Should be a caretaker. Look how they used wood back then. It really was a barn back in the seventeenth century; big old rugged beams and rafters. *Halloo, halloo*!" Vicar Scourd shouted and shook his head. "Unlocked? One bit of luck, then. Look, this won't do at all. You move in and potter about, and I'll roust up the Toberfinch ladies for a good wine-and-cheese affair. They'll feel bad you haven't been properly received, and turn it into a proper do." He let his voice slide to a lower setting: "I'd think the bishop might have written some of the lead parishioners . . ."

"I daresay he tried more modern methods," Richard said, hanging his coat on a peg in the Tithebarn's rear kitchen. "He may have been hindered by the local shortage of telephones. I still haven't got through to my organist. Look, five o'clock for the ladies, then. And meanwhile I'll settle in."

Some moments later Richard expelled a gust of air and let his shoulders slump. In truth, he was glad to see the Reverend Scourd motor off — the man's chatter was so nuggeted with information that it would take an hour's quiet just to absorb it all.

During that hour the new vicar opened the curtains, unsheeted the furniture, and emptied his suitcases into an upstairs wardrobe. He came down to explore what the house had for heat and plumbing, but at that moment the doorbell jingled.

He trotted across the entry hall and opened the door. "Tha's the new parson, then?" said a stout man in a cloth cap. "We saw thee coombing through the village."

Man? With a mouth so disfiguring, half again as wide — leprosy? Cancer? Concealing his hesitation, Richard stuck out his hand. "Happy to meet you. Yes, begging installation I'm your new man; Richard Enrick. And you?" He wondered if his visitor would give his name, so focused was he on trying to peer past Richard's obscuring frame. "Is there something I can do for you?" he asked, stepping aside.

"Wife's supposed to keep the place doosted." The man relaxed as he saw signs of upkeep. "I'm Geoffrey, Geoffrey Yetts. Tha'll be staying here, then?"

"For the time being. It's a bit monumental for one person."

"Nah, don't worry abaht that. She's a fine house, no mistake."

"And what do you do, Mr. Yetts?"

"I'm the pooblican, and local Party chairman, since tha' wants to know. And I sit on the parish council, so we needs to be square wi' one t' other. See, Church of England don't bother us, and we don't bother ye. And that's how we like it. Now lately we get eager young lads that wants to change things, and get rid of Tithebarn, pratin' of tourists like the last one. But what he couldn't understand was that we can't have tourists here in the Yettings. We's all fambly here, private-like, and we don't like outsiders snarping at us."

Richard nodded. "You came here to tell me that, right?"

"Have a lunch or two on the house if tha' likes, parson, my treat. It's right down the road, can't miss it."

"I'd think your pub would prosper if you had tourists here," Richard continued.

"What's mooney, then?" Geoffrey said, and shrugged. "All straight here? Tha'll know where to knock me oop if tha's got any complaints. Cheers then, an' good luck."

"See you in church Sunday?" the vicar called out the door to Geoffrey's retreating back. The publican's response was an appreciative chuckle, and a final wave as he trudged up the front drive on short, bowed legs.

Richard turned back into the Tithebarn, now bigger, creakingly empty, less friendly than before. A house the Church of England wanted to be rid of, not the local parish, it seemed, but everyone else.

Odd that these Labourites were boxing him into the role of country squire, ruling out a profitable alternative.

"I've never felt so isolated," Richard said softly, crossing to open doors at random. One led to a study. In the corner crowded a tiny pump organ with yellow keys and worn push/pull stops. Hardly twice the size of a harmonium, it was heavily built and impossible to move. He pumped the pedals for half a minute before managing to coax out a few bagpipe-like squeals.

There'd be a far superior organ in St. Kitts. A new vicar ought to make a beeline for his church, but Richard felt curiously adrift. He could vanish right now and who would know or care? Vicar Scourd and a couple of Cam-

bridge dons and scouts. Not many otherwise. He could vanish, and the inhabitants of Yettings Over would be rather the happier.

"Vanish?" he muttered. There was a front and back drive, the latter leading to the heart of his purpose, his mission, his kingdom of St. Kitts. In that way lay all convention, and a chance to spend some pious minutes on his knees. The front road was no shorter a route into Yettings Over, yet it drew Richard forward out of the vast old Tithebarn. He would explore this village of gray-skinned people, inbred and insular, unchurched — to proved that things weren't as bad as all that. Group labels could poison him against all those daft, quirkish *individuals* that populated rural England.

A half-hour later, after a visit to the local grocery-cum-stationers, Richard stood at the edge of a cliff overlooking a bay; it was PACEWATER on the ordinance map that fluttered half out of his grip in a gusty wind. The new vicar fought it into submission, and then resumed his study of the rooftops below his feet.

Yettings Over lay hardly a mile behind his back. Down ahead was Yettings Nether, its fishing boats grounded aslant during low tide. Two people stood along an embarcadero, but from this distance they looked just as deformed and *wrong* as the others he had encountered during his hike.

Inbreeding? Could mere incest produce a people like this? Richard sighed. Easy enough to follow the road's twists down to the shore, but harder work making the return, and what if the Toberfinch ladies came in his absence? It was time to admit defeat, return to his huge home, and maybe build a fire against the fog that was just beginning to puff in off the North Sea.

He had failed. Or rather, he had proved the negation of his hopes. Strolling from the cliff, he composed a letter in his mind, a bad joke he could never mail. "Dear bishop, as my parishioners are for the most part of an alien species, I must inquire as to a few theological points about their capacity for salvation . . ."

On his return he took the St. Kitts road and circumambulated his church. One of the old keys from the vicarage's study fit a chapel-door lock, and he poked inside. "Father" Enrick, Scourd had called him, possibly to provoke him into declaring high or low biases, Catholic or Protestant. Clearly this church was built to the Calvinist mentality, it had a pre-Victorian simplicity.

No regimental banners. An undersupply of brass plaques and dedicatory objects of art. Richard bent to scrutinize a commemorative slab: "Iohn Dounet 1738. In His Likeness Created He Him."

He climbed into the pulpit, wondering if he might find scraps of a predecessor's sermon. After poking about the choir he returned to the pews and bent to pray. Rarely was Reverend Enrick truly satisfied with his conversations with God, and this was worse than most — discovering within himself an illiberal prejudice against the gray toad-folk of the Yettings, he simply fought it down, forcing himself to concentrate on love and service. The re-

sult was a spinning of the wheels that left him feeling uncleansed; he was just wasting time.

With a sigh he got up and left the church. Entering the Tithebarn from the kitchen, he heard a scuffle in the front hall, and then a knock on the door. When he went to check, he found two somewhat embarrassed old men. "Er, ah — we'd let ourselves in. Reverend Scourd told us —"

"Come in, then. Know anything about laying a fire? My name's Richard Enrick; parson, vicar, father — take your pick of the titles," he spoke in vast relief at the sight of two normal faces. "We'll be entertaining the ladies later on."

"Ah, yes, the ladies." The taller man winked, then patted his comrade's shoulder. "This is Nick Solwood; *Colonel* Solwood, we like to say. We're overburdened with high staff up at the Home. And I'm Sergeant-Major Rundebone."

"Old horses out to pasture," Colonel Solwood said loudly, a sign he might be hard of hearing. "But we still like to sniff around the mares. Nothing but weekend wives and widows at Toberfinch, so that's where we like to bask in the sun."

Military people often spoke crudely, man to man. Richard would be judged on how he fielded their thrusts, but Solwood's vulgarities seemed genteel in the 1980s — two decades since even vicars were priggish. Richard nodded. "I'll just fetch some wood. Sit if you like. I can't offer anything — there may be ale in the cellar, but I haven't been down there yet. For all I know there's a corpse hanging in the loo."

His guests smiled politely at the joke. When Richard returned, he found Rundebone peering up the flue. "No way to know until we build a fire," he muttered. Minutes later trial and error proved that the chimney was clear and drawing.

As the flames began to crackle, Richard flung himself into a chair, occupying it Cambridge-fashion, half-sideways with a leg over an upholstered arm. His guests sat more stiffly. They looked at each other and felt the conversational gap grow long. "Uh, about the people here," Richard began. "I mean in Yettings Over. They seem, uh —"

"Bolshies," Colonel Solwood answered. "Nary one been in uniform. Not even to fight Hitler — just like your reds not to fight when Hitler and Stalin kept to their pact, no matter how many bombs he dropped on us. But afterward they found some doctor who declared the lot of 'em unfit for service. Can you feature pulling that off? Got a pack of Cockney kids loaded on them during the Blitz, and that's all."

"You won't see 'em at your soiree," the sergeant-major said. "They don't show up with outsiders about. They don't mix. Queer lot, and ugly as sin. Beggin' your pardon."

Richard frowned. "Everything about them seems so negative. What they *aren't* and what they *don't want*. They don't seem to have any positive at-

tributes. Any special local holidays? Any customs?" As he spoke, the new vicar imagined the stone cottages of Yettings Over, and the rooms inside: gray people huddled wordlessly, fearful of any knock at the door. He sighed. "There's something sad here. Something unwell."

Colonel looked at sergeant-major. "Talk to Meg when she gets here," Rundebone began. "She's one for going on about spirits —"

honk

Richard swung onto his feet and looked out the window. "Well, your patience is rewarded. Here's women and wine. Time for a spinster's baccha-nal!"

"Right ho." Rundebone went to the door. His colonel stood positioned as the ranking officer, nodding at the tinted heads of four Toberfinchers as they babbled their way inside. "Reverend! How wonderful to see you!"

Richard thought of the old ladies of his childhood: the flowery generation with their lace and drooping bosoms — Lillian and Violet and Henrietta. This was a newer age cohort: Doris, Meg, Jane, and Louise — pink, hale and bustley, vital enough to see the next century. He uncorked their wine while Jane found some glasses; meanwhile Scourd and the colonel occupied themselves in the Falkland Islands campaign. "— let our forces dwindle to the point that some tinhorn dictator —"

"Yes, but practically speaking —"

"Gentleman," he interrupted, then tried to find an excuse. "Ah, here we go. Thank you, Jane. Is it claret, then? A proper Church-of-England wine. Come, take your glasses."

"A toast," Scourd declared, raising his drink. "To the new vicar of St. Kitts."

"And missionary to the Yettings."

Richard caught Meg's eye, or vice versa. She set out the cheese platter and brought him a plate of assorted slices. "I'm afraid we're pretty bare-bones, last of the faithful. But it'll build. St. Kitts has been empty so long it's no wonder the energy has dissipated."

Richard sipped and set down his glass. "I wonder if for some there *is* any energy. They seem to have been born bloodless."

"The Yettings? What births? No outside doctor has ever delivered a Yettings child —"

"Now —" Jane began.

"Wouldn't they use Doctor Adcock? And he says the same."

Jane chuckled to cover Meg's embarrassing sincerity. "Meg has the most astounding theories."

Druids? Aliens? Fearing that Meg's speculations might run very wild indeed, Richard went into conversational retreat. "I'm not inventing something here, am I? Contributing to a sort of racism? Us versus them? That seems to be the way everybody thinks — they're a people apart."

"And racist themselves," Jane agreed. "Poor Leo — your predecessor. He

was colored, and when he walked down the lane, they'd duck indoors. They didn't even want to meet him!"

"Ah, yes. Leo —"

"Nigerian. An Oxford man. Wasted here, I'm afraid. I hear you're Cambridge yourself."

Jane's comment helped divert the conversation to Richard's career, and he reciprocated by getting thumbnail biographies of his guests. Doing so helped him fill out the landscape; he learned more about the local economy, the great families of yore, and the tribulations of World War Two and the postwar decade.

But there were two holes in this landscape: Yettings Over and Yettings Nether. Richard's thoughts drifted into these nearby villages as Meg's conversation grew arcane —

" 'Tober' means 'well.' Nearly half the volume of the Affrack River comes out of the ground just north of my house. That means there's an underground river, and loads of caves — *hidden* caves collecting water from the Westings to Swage Top and funneling it in our direction."

"*Here it comes*," Colonel Solwood whispered with a wink and a jab of the elbow, but loudly enough for Meg to hear.

"Do you think it's so odd that an underground world should have its own ecology?" she answered sharply. "Very well, it's true I once ventured a guess about our local faery legends. I'm sorry I did because that's all anyone associates me with, and I call it unfair."

Richard opened his mouth to speak, but the hour was late and the wine was gone, and the poor Yettings had taken enough conversational abuse. They hardly seemed like faeries, and anyhow they huddled at some distance from Toberfinch and the gate to Meg's underworld.

"— ought to put out word to British spelunkers that there's something worth looking at here." Everyone found it possible to agree, and Sergeant-Major Rundebone thought he might write his nephew about the matter. On this note the new vicar's visitors stood and began their good-byes; meanwhile Richard's spirits flagged. All he'd done tonight was to accept the wall between the Yettings and everyone else. As a witness to God's love it should have been his purpose to crack that wall. Perhaps he should confess his feelings of failure to Reverend Scourd, except that the chipper, chattering Scourd seemed likely to dismiss Richard's pangs of conscience all too lightly.

No, he said nothing, and Scourd left with the others. Two cars rolled off, and left him alone. Wine and cheese did not make a proper supper, but his kitchen was bare to the point of ghastliness: ammonia had vanquished any more nourishing odors of roast groundnuts and curry. The light of a long summer evening was too dim to let him explore the dark places of his underwired, centuries-old home. He climbed upstairs, flopped fully clothed onto his bed and found it lumpy — as he lay there he heard sighing pipes and

squeaking hinges.

The prospects were not good for a peaceful night's sleep. Perhaps he should go to Geoffrey Yett's pub and claim a meal.

"Damn!" All Richard had to do was think the thought and his soul filled with a horrid reluctance. He got up. It was darker now, but such fog as there'd been was confined to low, wet retreats. From a high hallway window he could see the village: roofs and bits of street, pools of shadow and the dazzle of two or three lamps. A hunched couple made their way into the pub and were swallowed up, and then came another couple, and another.

No music. Or might one not hear music from this distance? At least it was a sure thing the place was open for business.

Richard ambled back down to the hall, banked the few dying embers in his fire, and then went outdoors. The air was humid, cooling slightly, and full of smells: mown vegetation, a hint of the sea, a kind of musk. Years ago Richard's Chinese roommate complained that all Europe smelled of milk, but spilled milk and stale ale were city odors, absent here. This place had its own signature, which grew stronger as he walked into Yettings Over.

Certainly no music. What was going on?

Richard crossed the street. Through the panes of a slightly bayed window, he could see that a crowd had gathered, milling shadows in the pub's inadequate light, a press of people whose voices rose sharply and excitedly, dialect sometimes masking their words. Again the vicar hesitated, his hand halfway to the door latch. This seemed to be some kind of meeting, and there'd be no room to sit quietly with his ale and plate of bangers and mash.

The words from inside mystified his ears. "They's coombing out worse and worse. No one to impress the new ones so they're bad copies of bad copies. We *need* our outside friends!"

"Naaw, Harry. Lookit, they doone a remake of that movie, din't they? T' world won't forget, and what'll they make o' us, then? Slaverin', murtherin' — it's the fear, y' see."

Converting from potential customer to spy, Richard leaned into the door, guiltily counting the change in his wallet in case anyone was watching.

"An' then what? The last outsiders we had to work wi' was them London nippers, and we all grew large heads out o' that deal, long torsos and little kiddie legs, my harvest anyhow. And ye newer ones are bad copies o' that — sink me but soom o' ye don't dare coomb oot except at night, ye'd give 'em the fantods. We can't hide anymore. There's National Health snarping around, an' Education people scratchin' their heads, and t' Church parking Vicar Enrick on us — let's make the best of a bad deal, like we used to do afore that movie, and get soom new ones half shapely enough to keep the shops."

"How do we know we can trust him?"

"An' how about t' wimmen? They need their own —"

Richard stole to the window. The shadow speaking from a height behind

the bar might have been Geoffrey Yetts, it was hard to tell. "Look, lads," he began. "We stuck at turnin' out Nigerians in the heart o' England, an' so we had to shun that poor last fellow, but t' Church ain't been half bad to us before. And don't go off yer heads about yon movie — lot's o' filums in the old days abaht narsty Japs an' Germans, but naow who cares?"

Just at this moment, Richard heard footsteps. He looked up the street, and saw . . .

Coming out worse and worse? Nightmares? The figure was shrouded, bent almost double, and it scuttled half-apishly with the help of an overlong arm and a Brueghelesque crutch.

Was it time for them now? Time for the freakier citizens of Yettings Over to join the assembly at the pub? There were other sounds, and the slam of a door, but none yet along one line of retreat. Quickly, Richard turned and jogged for a pool of shadow.

"Ha! Wha's tha'?"

The pub door opened, and people started milling out.

Discovered? His heart beating double-time, the new vicar continued his retreat. *Get out of the village!* He could deny everything if he could only reach a country path, and then circle round to the Tithebarn — or did he *want* to reach the Tithebarn? Gray toad-folk with torches, talking of arson?

The moon was full. Until recently the long evening twilight had dominated, but now Richard depended on moonlight to help him pick his way east and south, almost opposite the direction to St. Kitts. This route led toward Swage Top, a path chosen by accident, but strangely straight and efficient — English country paths were rarely obsessed with goals, but this one wouldn't let him go. Fences first, and then a ditch, and then some tumbled rocks, and finally bracken. All these hemmed him toward Swage Top, while behind he heard — voices.

A mustering army, and a trample of leather on dirt.

Voices in pursuit would have a different quality, wouldn't they? Or was that a movie idea? Richard turned when he reached a point of vantage, and saw the flash of torch beams. "Careful naow," someone said solicitously to his neighbor.

It had something of the character of a parade, an excursion, a religious procession slovenly done, having formed up at the pub for this purpose, and now snaking along three hundred yards behind.

No, they weren't hunting him, although in his present predicament, with a goodly percentage of the population of Yettings Over following up this same path, Richard found it hard to convince himself of that fact. He stepped up his pace despite the steepening climb. Certainly he wasn't safe. They were private people, and any mission was a private mission.

Faster, faster — but *quietly*, like a shadow, and bent low like the things that trailed him!

Bracken seemed to need the protection of trees, and neither kind of

growth prospered in the North Sea winds, so that cover grew scanter as he went along. If they were really looking they might see him, but — thank God — here was a side path running north. He'd be exposed if he took it, but at this distance? With the moon behind him?

As furtively as possible, Richard tried to move out of the procession's way. He rounded a shoulder — Damn!

"*Halloo! Who's that?*"

He might have guessed there'd be a converging procession out of Yettings Nether. Trapped! No way to run steeply downhill in the dark, with all these rocks and thickets. In the movies the hero might try it, but then so many of those movies were from America, land of guns and car chases, where one might really expect bloodthirsty monsters.

American movie heros never ran out of breath after a hard climb, but here in England Richard's chest rose and fell, his breath steamed as he fought down his sobbing panic. *Come now*! Yes, no reason for his heart to pound so heavily in his ears — hadn't Geoffrey Yetts spoken of the Church in terms of possible friendship? He must be their leader . . .

Twin crowds snaked closer, torch beams danced around him and up his body. "*Surely there's a perfect explanation for everything*," Richard wheezed softly to himself, thinking this was a good time to summon up a little dignified sang-froid.

But what *was* his explanation? "I'm here to help you, if I can," he shouted in long-delayed answer, then turned back to face the citizens of Yettings Over. "I'm putting myself at your disposal."

He said this, and grimaced. The word *disposal* had a somewhat infelicitous sound, and it hung in the air until a familiar voice made its reply. "Parson? That's thee arsin' aboot? Good, then. We need thee."

The potholes on the heights of Swage Top were nearly circular, and surprisingly deep, jumbled limestone half-smoothed by soil, irregularities masked by vines and pockets of fertile leaf mold. The processions moved to surround one such crater, and then Geoffrey Yetts took Richard's hand in his dry, papery grip. Together they struggled down. "Men are boorn in different ways," he said, grunting and waving his foot, looking for purchase. "Tha' way has soomethin' extra to it, environment an' heredity. Our way? Well, we lose out, we skip the heredity. For us, it's all wha' we call *im*press. Here we go. Mind now, don't step in it."

"*In what?*" But Richard never said those words, he just watched as Geoffrey cleared away some vines and bits of rubbish: leaves, a torn rag, an empty yogurt container — lines of white?

Mushroom? Blancmange? The rocks seemed foamed up between, their interstices bulging with softness. The stuff was pale, marbled with tiny orange veins. As Richard watched it began to flow together, to form a bud.

It grew to the size of a cabbage. "Tha's his head," Geoffrey explained.

"Good, he's took thee for his model. He'd of had to take me, but copies are never as good, and copies of copies — please don't be takin' on. We'll do thee no harm. Soomtimes we talk harm, but nothin's ever coom o' it. We ain't quite human enough, I figger. We can't never be moore than ninety per cent human, see? It's not because we're ten per cent monster, but because t' other ten percent just ain't there."

No heredity. "I should feel sorry for you?" Richard responded in a hushed voice, watching the thing bubble out, masses of it no longer underground, filling to the shape of a human body. "Should I stand? Maybe move, so it can get a better estimate?"

"Please." Geoffrey gave a heavy sigh, and now for the first time Richard realized what an emotional event this was for him.

Like the birth of a child. Natural human childbirth, so bloody and painful, and yet a beautiful miracle — to humans. Just so. And this burgeoning congelation must be beautiful to those who stood in a great circle over his head, muttering in homely delight: "Lookit!"

"There's t' eyes naow, *so* nicely spaced." "Loong legs! He's goon ter 'av Parson's loong legs!"

Richard spoke again. "I should be naked."

Geoffrey looked up at him from the thing's side. "Nobody's ever doon that for us, not for a thousand years. We're all guesswork oonder our clothes."

Ragged clouds blew across the moon, so that only now and again did Richard's skin gleam with reflected light as he undressed, a fraction less luminous than the second Richard — a doppelganger? A fraud to take his place at St. Kitts?

He weathered a devastating wave of fear, suddenly convinced he'd be disposed of by boat in the cold North Sea; and then just as suddenly unconvinced — in an atmosphere growing every more rapt and reverent, he was ready to believe in Geoffrey Yetts and everything he said. Gently he spoke: "He won't have my color. He can't see color in this dark, and so the impress won't be as good as it should."

"We can't do this by day. Motorists would see, or hikers. They'd wonder, and think abaht that movie; yon creature in the Antarctic what stole people's bodies from 'em. But see, it's not too late for him nor any o' us. We can still take impress, even the old ones. It ain't so quick for us, month o' exposure, but we'll get better. We've been worsening bad from hiding away, but wi' your friendship's help we'll get better."

"All except t' wimmen," someone called from the rim.

Geoffrey reached, took the thing's arm, and helped it totter to its feet. "Andrew," he whispered, giving it a name. He faced Richard with a monstrously wide, disfigured smile, a smile of such innocent joy, such happiness — "Welcome to Yettings, we're tha' people now. Tha' ain't got a girl friend, maybe?"

The crowd rustled behind and above, bent couples supporting each other. Richard smiled back. "For you, I'll see what I can do." He paused and repeated Monica's phone number to himself to make sure he remembered. Monica the constant and true, whose off-putting passion for him had backed him into a contrary bachelorhood — yes, she'd do anything for him; for a price.

And she could play the organ, too! Richard let a more feral grin steal across his face. "Tell you what, I'll schedule a second service next Sunday, nothing for any outsiders to know about, just for you to expose yourselves and take our impress. But you'll all have to come, right?"

"Right," Geoffrey agreed, turning his attention to the new creature to his side, and leaving Richard to a swirl of delirious thoughts. He could see it now, a vicar's fantasy: the whole population of Yettings Over and Yettings Nether crowding the pews in false piety, bawling out forgotten hymns! St. Kitts full to overflowing — If only Richard dared boast to Reverend Scourd about his feat!

After a few months of growing normal, maybe he could! A triumphant proof of the Yettings' public presentability, a major accomplishment to add to Richard's *curriculum vitae* . . .

. . . and who could say otherwise for sure? Ninety per cent human? Maybe these things from the underworld *did* have souls to save!

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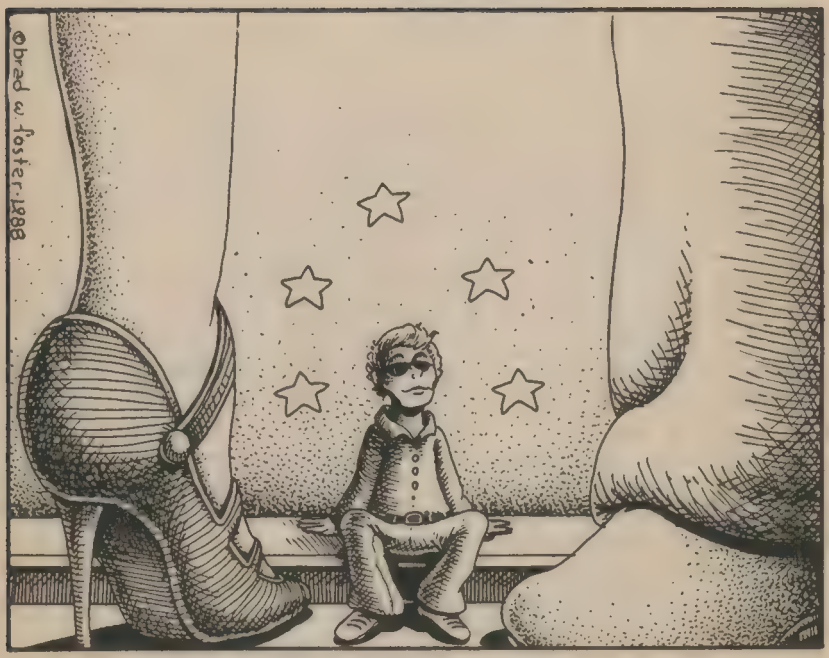
LIVING WITH THE GIANTS

by Paul Di Filippo

art: Brad W. Foster



Paul Di Filippo informs us that he is now the market reports editor for the Science Fiction Writers of America. Other than that new opportunity, his life remains quite drab. He has considered, therefore, hanging out at soda fountains.

Two of Paul's short fiction works have appared in Amazing® Stories*: "Kid Charlemagne" (September 1987; a 1987 Nebula Award nominee) and "A Thief in Babylon" (January 1989).*

I was sitting in a soda fountain when I was discovered by the giant who called herself Jayne Mansfield.

She pulled up in her big car, a red convertible Corvette with white leather interior. Each tire was the size of a normal subcompact vehicle. From my vantage point in the soda fountain, the cherry-colored hood was as big as Texas. The idling motor sounded like Niagara Falls.

Jayne gripped the steering wheel with one enormous hand, her huge tanned arm resting easily atop the lowered window. She wore a low-cut gypsy blouse that revealed cleavage like the Grand Canyon. Platinum earrings and necklace the color of her hair.

"Hello, handsome," she said. "What's a nice boy like you doing in a place like this?"

At first, I didn't know how to answer. I had never spoken to one of the giants before. Of course, they were all as familiar to me as my own face. Like everyone else, I had seen them endlessly depicted on television, in newspapers, magazines and movies, on billboards and at some distance in real life. But the giants seldom spoke to us little folks, and I was unaware of the protocols one might have to employ when answering them.

And besides, the media had now arrived in their dish-topped vans, hot on the scent of their product, the giants. That really made me nervous. I knew that whatever I said would be instantly broadcast around the world, printed in a hundred outlets by evening, analyzed and scrutinized tomorrow by all those eager mortals just like me, who longed for one of the giants to approach them. . . .

So I just sat there for a minute in the soda fountain, wondering what to say, while Jayne smiled expectantly, her perfect teeth big as small shovel blades.

Finally I decided. Hell, I thought, she had approached me, not the other way around, so I'd be damned if I'd fall all over myself answering her. I'd treat her just as I would one of my own kind.

"Just hanging out," I said with what I hoped was the proper insouciance.

"Do you do this kind of thing often?" she shot right back, the cameras tracking like palsied spectators between us.

I was just as sharp. "If you mean talking to giants, the answer's no. If you mean sitting in soda fountains—well, yes, whenever I'm feeling down."

Jayne's face crinkled in an expression indicative of mixed interest and mild revulsion. "Isn't it sort of — icky?"

She had a point. I lifted one hand up out of the frothy brown pool to wipe the Coke out of my eyes, but the falling droplets from the forty-foot spray rewet my face the very next instant.

"Yeah, I guess. But it sweetens up my disposition."

"Cute, cute." She paused to regard me with her enormous head cocked to one side. "So. Why are you depressed?"

"Why are you happy?"

"Because I have everything I want."

"Good reason." I didn't volunteer anything more. I was waiting to see

what else she had to say to me.

Jayne blew a pink bubble then, using what had to be four tons of gum. The rosy sphere was as big as one of Malcolm Forbes's hot-air balloons. I mean, the size of one of his old ones, not the ones he needed to carry him now. It popped with a sound loud as a cannon, and she sucked the gum back in between her silvered lips.

"What's your name, kid?"

"Marion."

"First or last?"

"First. Unfortunately."

"It won't do, won't do at all," said Jayne decisively. I didn't ask for what. "You're kind of rugged-looking. Stand up, please."

What the hell. She had said, "Please." I stood, caramel liquid runneling my soggy clothing.

"You're big," she said, and smiled. I realized how inapt that word was, applied to one of us little folks. "For your kind, that is."

She was silent again, sizing me up speculatively. "Okay, Marion, listen close. I'm a staunch believer in coincidences, destiny, the stars, stuff like that. Let's take a chance. I say you can be John Wayne."

I shrugged. "Okay, I'm John Wayne. So what?"

"Why don't you get out of there, so we can talk better."

"All right. I was just about done anyway." I wasn't going to let her think she could order me around. No sense in letting this relationship get off on the wrong footing.

One leg over the fluted rim of the stone basin, I stopped short.

Relationship? What relationship?

Shit, why was I kidding myself? I knew this was my big break. As a hundred lenses zoomed in on me, as shutters clicked and electronic flashes discharged, as reporters scribbled and spoke into mikes, I could practically feel myself starting to grow.

I couldn't get too close to Jayne's car, or I wouldn't have been able to see her above the cliff-like chassis, so I stood back some distance from her vehicle, dripping on the elevated terrace around the soda fountain.

"Now what?" I asked politely, but, I hoped, not obsequiously.

"Get in the car."

"But my clothes — I'll ruin your upholstery. Hell, look at what the spray's doing to your paint job." I pointed to the Corvette's hood, where the Coke was eating pits into the cherry lacquer.

"Forget it," she said. "I'll have it fixed. Just shut up and climb in, before I change my mind."

She levered open the passenger door. It swung out like some Ali Baba mountainside to my unspoken "Open, Sesame." I had to jump back so it wouldn't knock me flat.

"C'mon," admonished Jayne. "Hop aboard."

Easier said than done. I walked with squishing noises over to the car, conscious all the time of the cameras on me. When I stood beside it, I had to reach up fifteen inches over my head to grasp the aluminum ridge of the doorframe. I chinned myself, flexed my arms, caught a toehold, then stood on what seemed to be an acre of dirty auto carpet. I had to repeat the sequence to get into the cowhide-smelling seat.

I looked up at Jayne towering beside me. It was like staring at the Colossus of Rhodes. Her bust was mountainous. I tried to picture her bra.

"Good start," she told me, reaching across to shut the door. Her arm resembled a freckled wall. The sound of the door slamming nearly deafened me.

Then she peeled out. The acceleration forced me back deep into the seat.

I could see there was going to be a lot to get used to in my new life.

Jayne's mansion occupied a part of the city that had formerly comprised an entire residential subdivision. The whole plat had been taken by eminent domain and allocated to the giants when they had first manifested themselves. We had thought it might be enough space for all of them to live in. It took hundreds of men six months to demolish all the existing structures, cart the rubble away, level the ground, and lay fresh green turf over an area as big as Central Park.

The giants had then come in and built precisely one enormous structure on the land.

Other parcels around the nation were quickly appropriated and given to the giants, whereupon they built more titantic mansions fit for their kind.

No one except a few cynics minded all that much. We had quickly found we couldn't live without the giants. They added so much luster to our drab lives. We gloried in their shadows, as if in the brightest sunlight. They were the talismans that gave ultimate meaning to our own humble existences.

Jayne opened her garage door with a remote control big as a refrigerator, and we drove in. It was like entering NASA's Vehicle Assembly Building.

Once inside the hanger, Jayne said, "Okay, John, follow me."

For a second, I didn't know who she could be referring to. Then I remembered: it was my new name; I was now to become John Wayne.

I hoped I was up to the role.

Reversing the procedure I had used to enter Jayne's car, I soon stood on the concrete floor. Jayne was striding toward a door leading into the house, and I had to run to keep up with her. The oil stains on the floor were as big as lakes, and involved wide detours. By the time I reached the portal, she had vanished. Luckily, she had left the door open, and I was able to get inside.

The interior of Jayne's mansion was vistas of brocade and crystal, lustrous woods and shiny marble, velvet curtains and silver fixtures. It was all half-familiar to me, and I was surprised not be more in awe of it until I realized the reason why. I had seen it a hundred times before, on TV and movie

screens, the myriad rooms filled with the laughing, passionate figures of Jayne and her kind.

I don't know if I've mentioned that Jayne was wearing perfume. She smelled like a whole greenhouse full of freesias. Thus I was easily able to follow her scent through the house — whose topography was not totally strange to me — until I found her in the bedroom.

Jayne had kicked off her high heels and was unsnapping her toreador pants when I walked in, panting and exhausted from my alpine expedition up her stairs.

"Hurry up, John, we have to have sex now."

I tried to catch my breath. "Is that part of the job description?"

"Don't be silly. Your new life could hardly be called work. You're just supposed to enjoy yourself." Jayne had her slacks down over her hips. She wasn't wearing any panties. I was riveted by the sight of her pubic bush: it was as thick and extensive as what was left of the Amazonian rain forests.

"I hardly see how we'll be able to do anything together," I ventured.

"Oh, it'll be awkward at first, but things will get easier as you start to grow. Having sex with a giant is, in fact, one of the ways you begin to grow. This is the commencement of your new life, John."

I lifted my shoulders sheepishly. I had no one to blame for this but myself. If I was uncomfortable now, it was only because I had succumbed to the lure of the giants and placed myself in this situation. I would have to do what Jayne said from now on. There was no turning back.

I began to undress, tossing my wet, tiny garments to the floor.

Jayne's pants were down around her ankles. She bent at the waist to remove them completely.

It had been pointless to try to visualize Jayne's bra, for she was wearing none. Her breasts spilled out of her blouse, exactly as those of the original Jayne had tumbled forth, in that famous picture that graced the cover of that book about an earlier generation of giants, more nearly our own size.

I stared like a fool. They were big as whales.

"Hurry up," Jayne repeated.

I hurried. Jayne lay already in the bed. I stood helplessly on the rug. Finally I spotted the bedside lamp's electric cord. I began to climb hand over hand up its slippery length.

Perched on the bed-table's edge, I surveyed the recumbent form of Jayne, which seemed to stretch for miles.

This would not be making love, I knew.

This would be exploring a continent.

I jumped down, landing softly on the mattress.

Like Lewis and Clark, I began to chart unknown territory.

I ranged from mountains to valleys, was almost swept out to sea when I ventured down to the delta. I don't know what, if anything, Jayne got out of my travels, but it was certainly an experience I had never imagined and was

glad I had not refused.

Halfway through doing what I was doing, I stopped, stricken with a new thought.

"Jayne — are there cameras watching us now?"

"Of course. There are always cameras."

"Do they have to be on?"

"Do you want to grow?"

I considered what Jayne and I might do when I got more nearly her size. "Yes."

"Then they have to be on. You don't grow except on video."

If I had been leery before of becoming what Jayne proposed, I was now utterly bent on it. I realized anew that I would do whatever she said.

It turned out to be pretty reasonable, considering a giant's needs.

Life with Jayne and her fellow giants wasn't bad, considering I wasn't yet their peer. During most of the day, Jayne and I shopped, ate in public, or made our peculiar kind of love. The shopping, of course, was just show, since there was nothing in any of the tiny stores that Jayne could possibly use. The ritual consisted of promenading up and down the sidewalks, oohing and aahing at the unseen contents of store windows down around her shins, letting the public feast their eyes on us. It was hard work keeping up with Jayne's pace, but mostly I managed. Occasionally, I got to ride Jayne's pet leopard when she took him out. He was commensurate in size with Jayne, and I was frightened of him at first, until Jayne explained that he would no more deign to eat me than a cat would bother with a crumb.

I recalled some of the cats I had owned, and was not reassured. But eventually, I got used to sitting up on his broad furred back, just behind his rhinestone collar, beneath the arc of a leash that was as thick as a cable on the Brooklyn Bridge.

Several times every day I checked myself in the mirror for signs of growth. After several weeks, I imagined I could detect an increase in my stature. I asked Jayne what she thought.

She frowned, and said, "Yes, you're definitely growing. But not fast enough. There seems to be some problem. I don't know if the public is quite ready to believe in you as John Wayne. We need to get you some more publicity. Are you practicing your drawl?"

"Waal, dang it, Missy," I attempted, "Ah'm shore tryin' to get this here way of jawin' down."

"Not so broad, please."

"Sorry."

Jayne's frown was replaced by a look of concentration. "We're going to have to throw a gala affair in your honor. That should help you grow. I'll get busy calling people right away."

I had already been to many parties with Jayne, but none of them had ever

been held specifically for me. I hoped it would work.

A date was arranged for a week from the day, and the engraved invitations — each big as a billboard — were sent out.

Meanwhile, life continued as before, an endless round of photo opportunities: charity galas and nightclub appearances, theater openings and celebrity banquets, awards ceremonies and film festivals . . . .

At one such occasion, I was approached for the first time by a reporter. I can't even remember now what questions were asked of me; all I recall is babbling blithely into a microphone while the cameras closed in tightly on my face. But the contact with the media had its effect.

The next time I laid myself naked across Jayne, I found that, by dint of stretching to my utmost, I was now able simultaneously to reach each nipple with the tip of an index finger.

It was an historic moment in my life. I was convinced that eventual true giant's status would soon be mine.

There was one funny thing about the size of the giants, though. It fluctuated.

When I initially noticed this fact, I was inclined to believe I was hallucinating. Nothing in the public knowledge about the giants had ever prepared me for this possibility. Eventually, however, I was forced to accept it as truth.

Sometimes, the giants would seem utterly Gargantuan, their heads in the clouds, their feet planted solidly as islands in the sea. These times seemed to coincide with the focus of media attention on them, the adoration of the public. At such times, the giants seemed positively to radiate a kind of glory borrowed from their audience.

At other times, the giants seemed big, but not cosmic in scale. They were more like occupants of the extreme end of the permissible human spectrum than like Olympian immortals. This was the stature, in fact, that they most often held in my eyes now.

And sometimes they even looked strictly mortal, or less than human. When, very rarely, a giant stumbled, or made a faux pas . . .

I remember once when Jayne caught some kind of flu. She lay groaning and moaning in bed, clutching her stomach, before she had to jump up with a case of diarrhea.

When she finally came out of the bathroom, I could almost look her in the eyes.

But that didn't last long.

The glamour always returned.

And I must confess that I was hoping the upcoming party in my honor would confer some on me.

My big day arrived at last. Jayne insisted that I dress in my Stetson and chaps, boots and spurs. She'd be wearing a clinging white cocktail dress

with spaghetti straps, calculated for maximum exposure of her assets.

I could hardly contain myself until evening. I spent the day in front of my mirror, dressed in my John Wayne outfit, practicing my accent, watching for any sudden spurts of growth. It was a long way from hanging out in soda fountains, I told myself.

Around six the caterers arrived, little people like I had once been. They were equipped with a whole fleet of vehicles needed to carry around the giant canapes and trays of drinks. This fleet was airlifted by choppers to the tabletops, where the troops deployed themselves and began unloading Ritz crackers as big as manhole covers. A team of engineers erected a huge silver champagne fountain, and a convoy of tanker trucks arrived to fill it. Soon, bubbly was tumbling down into the terraced basins.

I supervised the operation with an air of superiority, noting with pride how I towered over these former kin of mine, easily twice as tall. After tonight, I was sure, I would dwarf them utterly.

The musicians arrived at eight. They, however, were giants. I recognized Hendrix, Lennon, Morrison, Joplin, Holly, and Redding. And, of course, Elvis. Lord, this was gonna be one hell of a party. I was so excited. Jayne had spared no expense for me. At the same time I was as nervous as a Victorian bride. I hoped I would be able to live up to her expectations.

I helped the tiny roadies to deploy the enormous microphones, cumbersome as battleship cannons, hoping to exhaust some of my nervous energy. All I succeeded in doing was getting so sweaty that I had to go upstairs and change my spangled shirt.

Around nine the guests began to stroll in.

I had never seen such a glittering galaxy of giants. Practically everyone who was anyone was there. Warhol, Onassis, Princess Grace, Montgomery Clift, Liz, Lisa, Mick, Gable, Madonna, Charles and Di, Malcolm Forbes, Donald Trump, Carl Icahn, Mailer, Updike, King, Kubrick, Scorsese, Newman, Fonda (Henry and Jane), Picasso (Pablo and Paloma), Schnabel . . .

Each one of them greeted me personally as he came in, the men shaking my little hand with care not to crush it, the women launching air-kisses over my head as they pressed me to their tremendous bosoms.

It was all too much for me. My head began to whirl. I barely managed to utter the requisite perfunctory pleasantries. I felt my limbs and torso lengthening, enlarging, with every embrace and handclasp.

When Brando walked through the door, having jetted in unexpectedly from his tropic hideaway, I almost fainted. (His jet was as big as the Empire State Building. It needed a runway the size of Rhode Island.)

After the majority of guests had arrrived, I left my post by the door and plunged into the heady social vortex, circulating among the giant glitterati.

Everything went fine until midnight. That was when I made my fatal mistake.

I had had too much to drink and snort. (The giants laid lines thick as

standard-guage rails across mirrors as big as the Rockefellar Center skating rink. Their rolled-up bills were the circumference of mighty oaks.) I got into an argument with Dennis Hopper about just how good an actor James Dean had been. I had to stand on a chair to maintain eye contact with Hopper, but I thought I was holding my own.

Then Dean himself walked up, invariably attracted by the sound of his own name, as most giants were.

He poked me in the chest with a finger big and stiff as a telephone pole.

"Hey, you asshole pygmy, who are you to be puttin' me down?"

I tried to summon up some John-Wayne-style bravado, but could think of no rejoinder save a stammered, "Who, me?"

"Yeah, you," said Dean, exhibiting no more wit than I. Unfortunately, this was not a contest of wit, but of sheer size.

Before I could react, Dean had picked me up and, with a minimum of ceremony, dumped me in the champagne fountain.

The whole room went dead silent, all attention focused on me. But it was the wrong kind of attention. Hostile and from my superiors, it did not make me grow. Instead, it began to have the opposite effect. I could feel myself shrinking, shrinking. . . .

From nowhere Jayne appeared.

"Well, you can take the boy out of the soda fountain, but you can't take the fountain out of the boy. . . ."

The giants all burst into harsh laughter, the men roaring and the women tittering.

"All right, Marion," said Jayne. "Haul ass and clear out."

I didn't even bother to try to protest. I knew that the broadcast of my shame had already been seen by the whole world, and that the public would never accept me as John Wayne after such a disgrace. I didn't even bother to pack any of my new clothes, which I knew would be too big in just a few days. I just pulled myself out of the champagne and slogged wetly over to the door.

A few weeks later I was back to my normal size. I didn't mind too much. It felt more comfortable somehow. I didn't return to hanging around soda fountains, though. Those days were over. Instead I found a job, met a nice girl my own size, got married, settled down, had kids, got older. . . .

I never followed the lives of the giants much after my exile from their midst. It was just too painful. But every once in a while, I will admit, I did daydream about the days when I was almost one of them.

And you know — I could've sworn at such moments I actually shot up an inch or two.

SCIENCE FICTION ON VIDEO: The Triumph of Special Effects

by Matthew J. Costello

FILM ESSAY

This series of essays traces the history and evolution of science-fiction films, the major themes, and the technological breakthroughs. Past film essays by Matthew J. Costello include "Classics of the Silent Era" (January 1988), "German Expressionism Meets Hollywood" (May 1988), "Aliens Within and Without" (November 1988), and "Strange Days and Stranger Nights" (March 1989).

So, just what was the message of Stanley Kubrick's *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968)?

First, the era of less than startling special effects was over. Effects must be real, seamless, capable of provoking awe in even the most jaded audiences. Second, science-fiction films could be big, mainstream hits. However, they would need *big,* comfortable budgets. SF films could become the epics of its age, much like the biblical spectaculars of Cecil B. de Mille, *The Ten Commandments* (1956) and *Ben Hur* (1959). And third, SF films should deal with *big,* important ideas. You didn't take the galaxy as a background and use it to tell a mere story, some star-bound saga that could just as easily have played in the court of Louis XIV.

Or so it seemed. The 1970s began by embracing the whole package: good, if not great effects, big budgets, and a earnest willingness to deal with ideas that Tinseltown must have been a bit uncomfortable with.

But the actual formula — and that's what it would become — would prove a bit more elusive than that. Elusive and, as it turned out, much simpler.

There is a division between the probing, sometimes thoughtful films of the early '70s and the gee-whiz sound and light spectacles of the decade's closing years. Up until 1977, Hollywood's post-*2001* SF films dealt with the problem of overpopulation, the depersonalization of modern society, the crass materialism of modern life, the damage to the biosphere, and the final violence of nuclear Armageddon.

Then, because of one film, the themes and concerns of SF films would change. They would have no other concern other than entertainment. Escapism, fueled by massive special-effects workshops, would deliver record-breaking audiences that told Hollywood what the American public *really* wanted out of its genre movies. From that point on, with only a few exceptions, SF films would cater to the audience's visceral experience, its reaction to the cinematic roller-coaster ride.

An unlikely director — unlikely because of his academic difficulties and a consuming interest in fast cars — was to play a key role in both parts of SF in the '70s. And his name was George Lucas, Jr., of Modesto, California.

Nothing typifies the SF films of the early '70s better than young George Lucas's *THX 1138* (American Zoetrope, color, 1970, 95 min.).

Lucas drifted toward USC's film school with no burning ambition to become a filmmaker. He came from a loving, no-nonsense home where his father dispensed common-sense advice about life, work, and paying bills. George had a strong interest in SF and fantasy, especially comic books. Dale Pollock, in his biography of Lucas, *Skywalking,* records that "Lucas was . . . enthralled with Batman and Robin, Superman, *Amazing Stories, Unexpected Tales* — and the list goes on and on."

Later, Lucas's interests centered on cruising his small hometown of Modesto, the inspiration for his film, *American Graffiti* (Universal, color, 1973, 110 min.). A massive car accident in 1962 landed George in the hospital, where he spent the summer recuperating. It was during this period that Lucas started reading classic SF novels, including Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World,* George Orwell's *1984,* and the novels of Jules Verne.

Writing was difficult for young Lucas, but he loved to draw and design things. Once at USC, he realized that a visual field like filmmaking was his natural element.

Lucas made a 20-minute student film, *THX 2238 4EB,* and it impressed a number of people, including Francis Ford Coppola. Coppola's American Zoetrope arranged financing for Lucas's film to be expanded into a feature. That feature, *THX 1138,* was a grim exercise that mixed elements of *1984* with *Brave New World.* In Lucas's sanitized, oppressive future, everyone had a number instead of a name (an idea first used in the 1930 film, *Just Imagine*). Children are born in test tubes and lovemaking has been outlawed.

But THX, stolidly played by Robert Duvall, stops taking the antisex drug administered by the state and falls in love with LUH (played by Maggie McOmie). With physical desire renewed, the inevitable happens and THX makes LUH pregnant. Their crime is discovered, and THX is imprisoned by mechanical police with silvery masks and is placed in a glaring white room. THX breaks away, streaming through the underground warren to the wide-open spaces above. Coyly, Lucas has the pursuit called off because it exceeded its budget.

The film performed poorly at the box office, though it had its cultish admirers, with good reason. A grim, soulless world has never been better depicted. There are confessional booths for the numbered populace to admit their doubts and shortcomings to OMM, a consoling "Big Brother" figure. A malfunctioning mechanical cop keeps bumping into a wall. The glare of the pristine chambers and hallways of this underground compound recall the look of *2001*'s Discovery. *THX 1138* expands the emptiness conveyed by Kubrick's vision of the future.

Variety accurately predicted "nixed b.o. (box office) at present," then, in a remarkable display of prescience, "but could become a future buff classic." But it was, and remains, as British critic Leslie Halliwell described it, "a rather cold affair." Its failure nearly destroyed Coppola's Zoetrope studio, and its lesson — about films and audiences — was not lost on George Lucas.

The year 1971 saw the return of Stanley Kubrick for the final film in what has been unofficially referred to as his "science-fiction trilogy," *A Clockwork Orange* (Polaris Productions/WB, color, 136 min.). Though Kubrick's *2001* provoked puzzled stares, yawns, and confusion

among some critics, it was nothing compared to the reception awarded *A Clockwork Orange.*

Based on Anthony Burgess's novel of the same name, *A Clockwork Orange* was the story of Alex and his droogs (bully-boy buddies), who devoted their lives to the practice of ultraviolence. The setting is a decadent futuristic world where the language has been heavily influenced by Russian. The teenagers use a new polyglot slang called Nadsat (the Russian word for the numbers eleven to nineteen, the teens). Vapid erotic art dominates the landscape.

Malcolm McDowell plays Alex Delarge, an impish, likable maniac who leads his gang on nightly rampages of mugging and raping. The violence is stylized and often humorous, as when Alex attacks and rapes a writer's wife while crooning "Singing in the Rain."

Eventually, Alex gets snagged for one of his crimes and is given a peculiar chance for freedom: the Ludovico treatment offered by the Liberal Party. Alex watches scenes of violence and sex, and he's rewarded with painful jolts. The treatment is complete when he's put on display, beaten, and forced to lick the shoe of an actor who taunts him.

But when Alex is mauled by his old pals, he finds refuge in the home of his former victim. This man is at first unaware of just who Alex is. When he discovers the truth, he attacks Alex, sending him to the hospital. While there, Alex is visited by a penitent minister of the interior who offers Alex a government job. Alex, meanwhile, regains his taste for nasty sex and ultraviolence. "I was cured all right," he tells us.

John Barry designed Kubrick's sets. The predominant color was white, and except for the lifeless erotic art, this world could easily be part of *2001* or *THX 1138.* Compare, for example, the business people meeting in the Korova Milk Bar with the scene in *2001* when Dr. Floyd meets with the Russian scientists outside the space station's Howard Johnson's.

Available light was used (now a Kubrick trademark), and cameraman John Alcott employed a lot of backlight and photofloods to give everything a brilliant, futuristic gleam. Such lighting also meant an 85% smaller lighting crew. Shadows — of Alex, his droogs, and their victims — cut across the brilliant stretches of white.

Walter (later Wendy) Carlos sent Kubrick some tapes of electronic music. Kubrick used Carlos's synthesized classical music to give the film an additinal lack of warmth, an added feeling of sterility. Kubrick filmed much of *A Clockwork Orange* with a hand-held camera, coming close to Alex when he was enjoying some bout of sex or violence, then pulling away from the act itself lest it repel us from the "hero."

A Clockwork Orange is a darkly humorous film, much more at home in the world of *Dr. Stangelove* than *2001.* When Mr. Deltoid, a school counselor, comes to visit Alex, the ineffectual civil servant accidentally drinks a glass of water with false teeth in it. And people are both shocked and amused by McDowell's gut-pounding rendition of "Singing in the Rain." For most people who've seen the film, that scene is one of the most memorable they've experienced.

The film drew tremendously negative responses from many critics. It was the first SF film to get an X rating from the MPAA rating board. *Variety* accused it of "outrageous vulgarity, stark brutality." Pauline Kael cited the

violence of the era, especially the Manson murders, and claimed that Kubrick "is catering to it. I think he wants to dig it." *New York Times* critic Fred M. Hechinger said, "An alert liberal should recognize the voice of fascism. . . ." Hechinger also cited the film's "deeply antiliberal totalitarian nihilism." Roger Ebert of the *Chicago Tribune* exclaimed, "What the hell is Kubrick up to here?"

But some critics have responded to Kubrick's cold vision. Hollis Alpert, in the *Saturday Review,* called it "an extraordinary accomplishment [that] will undoubtedly cause shock waves among other directors. Kubrick, in technical areas at least, has surpassed all."

Kubrick's position, and Burgess's, is clear. If we love humanity, if we value freedom, then we have to love Alex. "I wanted," Kubrick said, "Alex's life to appear to us as it did to him, not restricted by the conventional pieties." Thus, the violence in *A Clockwork Orange* is, as described by Jay Cooks of *Time Magazine,* "totally stylized, dreamlike, absurd." We see the violence with Alex's eyes. "We identify with Alex on the unconscious level," Kubrick told Michel Ciment, author of *Kubrick*, a definitive study of the director.

The book, *A Clockwork Orange,* represented Burgess's attempt to deal with his personal experience of violence — his wife's rape by three American soldiers stationed in London during the war. But Kubrick's film is rooted in the sensibilities of the early '70s. The sexual material, the giddy mix of naked nubiles, explicit erotic art on the order of $10 velvet paintings from Woolworth's, as well as the graphic violence, celebrate the dubious new freedoms of film, circa 1971. It was as if Kubrick were saying that, if *film* is to be free, then this vision too *must* be seen, no matter how upsetting it is to some and how titillating to others.

"As far as I'm concerned," Kubrick said, "the most memorable scenes in the best films are those which are built predominantly of image and music." In *2001,* Kubrick bypassed the intellect and stimulated the viewer's emotional responses directly. *A Clockwork Orange* uses potent images of a completely different type to agitate, disturb, and confuse the audience. In three SF films, Kubrick's phenomenal technique had been harnessed to important themes.

But as Tinseltown would soon discover, such light and magic needn't tackle such weighty matters.

It was interesting to review the film *The Man Who Fell to Earth* (British Lion, color, 1976, 138 min.) twelve years after its release.

The story is simple. An alien, calling himself Tom Newton (played by David Bowie), comes to Earth. He sells and pawns a pile of gold "wedding bands" to raise money. Newton then brings a stack of patents to attorney Oliver Farnsworth (played by Buck Henry) for an array of high-tech devices. Newton's patents provide the basis for a multimillion dollar empire run by Farnsworth while the alien remains in the background.

Newton becomes absorbed by television, and then, aided by a frowsy, hard-drinking chambermaid, he begins to drink. The TV and the booze become symbols of Newton's desire to escape, to return to his wife and children, who await him on his planet. From his daydreams, we learn that his planet is in need of water. His wife and children wear suits that recycle fluids from their bodies, as in Frank

Herbert's *Dune.* The goal of his economic empire is to construct an enormous ship to take some of Earth's water home with him.

But this is not to be. Some anonymous figures capture the alien when he is on the verge of leaving. He is brought to a hotel and imprisoned in a suite with a wide-screen TV and enough gin in which to float a battleship. They take blood, they probe his skin, they shoot X-rays into his eyes, sealing his blue-eyed contacts onto his natural lizard-like eyes. "Please," he begs, "not my eyes." The authorities destroy the alien's ship, but he succeeds in escaping the hotel.

Even so, he's trapped now, wandering around like Wotan, a broad-brimmed hat covering his face, overcoat pulled tight against the unthinking, unfeeling world. And, always, a martini in his hand, as his head falls forward onto the table. He's alive, but trapped, lost to the empty solace of alcohol.

The Man Who Fell to Earth followed director Nicholas Roeg's *Don't Look Now* (British Lion/Casey/Eldorado Productions, color, 1973, 100 min.), his moody interpretation of the Daphne du Maurier shocker. While *The Man Who Fell to Earth* is decidedly a downbeat film, it's also a haunting one. Bowie is nothing short of brilliant, creating the screen's most completely realized alien. We feel his aching loneliness and the wonder of seeing a planet through television — the riots, the game shows, a pair of lions mating. The alien surrounds himself with a bank of TV screens, as if trying to drink in the planet he can't venture out to see.

Roeg uses the TV in the background to comment on the action in the film. He favors old films, letting the characters comment on the action and answer questions. The alien learns proper and socially polite responses from the television. Such "television" commentary would appear in other directors' films, notably those of Stephen Spielberg.

The Christ imagery in this film is also effective, if anything but subtle. The alien "falls" to Earth, down to the world of men, acting as one of them even if he is not. When he is held in his hotel suite, his girl friend pleads with him to prove who he is. But, like Christ, he won't perform miracles on demand. "I want to go home," he says wearily. But this is one alien that doesn't get to go home.

The film is, we see with clear hindsight, the darkside of *E.T.* (1982). And I'd be very surprised if this film wasn't seen by Spielberg and company before launching *E.T.* Like Stephen Spielberg's cute little visitor, Newton learns about the planet from the great tube, ingesting an indiscriminate diet of commercials, shoot-em-ups, and sitcoms. E.T. also gets into the Budweiser, even if he doesn't use it for the same crutch that Newton does. While Spielberg looks kindly on the flotsam of popular culture, Roeg's vision is more depressing, more on the mark.

Both aliens, though, want to go home. E.T. is maltreated, but in Spielberg's universe, children and childlike acts can save it all. But no mother ship arrives to take Newton home, and there will be no "phoning home." Trapped, and with the eyes permanently damaged, Newton realizes that his family will probably die on their bone-dry planet.

RCA-Columbia has issued *The Man Who Fell to Earth* in a restored version that includes 20 minutes cut from the release print. Though Leslie Halliwell describes *The Man Who Fell to Earth* as "not an easy film, or a likable one,"

it is never less than compelling. Occasionally, the story seems to jump, and the color and camerawork speak of a more experimental era of filmmaking. But it is thoughtful science fiction, a film that haunts you days after you've seen it.

Star Wars (Twentieth-Century Fox/ Lucasfilm, color, 1977, 121 min.), the archetype of the SF blockbuster, had a less than confident beginning. Lucas showed a treatment for his SF film to executives at Columbia Pictures and Universal, both of whom passed on the project. Sporting characters with names like Annakin Starkiller and Leia Aguilae, Lucas's plot and the characters would be transformed in the many incarnations of the project.

Dale Pollock reported that some of Lucas's friends "thought he was ruining his career with his obsessive belief in *Star Wars.*" But when Lucas hired Boeing Aircraft illustrator Ralph McQuarrie to produce paintings of scenes from his proposed film, it gave an exciting life to the project. Twentieth-Century Fox gave Lucas $10,000 to start developing the project. And with nearly $500 million dollars earned by *Star Wars* alone, it may just have been the best $10,000 ever spent by a studio.

Danny Peary calls *Star Wars* "arguably the most influential film ever made," but it might more properly be described as the most "influenced" film ever made. Lucas's story of young Luke Skywalker (played by Mark Hamill) joining the rebellion to battle the evil emperor and his helmeted henchman was crafted of clichés, as were many of the key sequences in the film. There was the young rebel princess (played by Carrie Fisher), a damsel in distress, albeit with more chutzpah and guts than the traditional cleavage. The wise-cracking, adventurer/sidekick was given its definitive interpretation by Harrison Ford. Throw in a Laurel and Hardy robot team and the sublimely sinister Darth Vader, and we're in familiar territory.

It is, of course, the stuff that the serials were made of. Lucas wanted to make *Flash Gordon,* but he found the cost of the rights too prohibitive. So Lucas used his own reservoir of images and plot, and key books like Joseph Campbell's tome on myths, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces,* to craft what Phil Hardy has called "a myth for our time."

Film buffs quickly spotted Lucas's many sources of inspiration. C3P0 resembles the robot in *Metropolis,* and the raid on the Death Star mirrors scenes from *The Dam Busters* (1954) and *633 Squadron* (1964) — both screened by Lucas before working on *Star Wars.* The end of *Star Wars,* where the heroes receive medals for their valiant service, rather incongruously recalls both *The Wizard of Oz* (1939) and Leni Riefenstahl's Nazi propaganda documentary, *The Triumph of the Will* (1936). *Time* magazine even credits Lucas's father, who admonished George, "Early to bed, early to rise, be true to yourself, work hard and be frugal," with inspiring the folksy wisdom of Obi Wan Kenobi.

It was George Lucas's vision to create just this kind of film. In 1977, before the film opened, he said, "I'm trying to make a classic space fantasy in which all the influences are working together. . . . I hope it's a big success and a lot of people do space-fantasy adventure movies because I want to go see them."

Lucas's aspiration was shaped from his own experience at school, where he did poorly and suffered with bullies.

He reveled in the exploits of his favorite comic-book heroes. It is no accident that Lucas's hero is called Luke. And while the films Lucas hoped for would quickly follow, inspired by the phenomenal success of *Star Wars,* few had a fraction of the energy or imagination of *Star Wars.*

The great success of the film was due to Industrial Light and Magic, Lucas's special-effects factory established for the production. During *Star Wars*'s production period, Industrial Light and Magic's youthful corps of craftspeople and technicians worked irregular hours, around the clock, eager to create effects that had never been seen before.

The beginning was less than auspicious. Richard Edlund, director of photography and currently head of Boss Effects, his own company, described the first Industrial Light and Magic work space: "It was a large, empty industrial building. All there was was a table in the middle of the floor with a telephone on it."

One of Edlund's first tasks was to locate an old VistaVision camera. This type of camera ran at a brisk 100 frames per second and used more negative space to record an image. This detail proved vital to filming realistic effects.

Ralph McQuarrie designed ships and other *Star Wars* material, working at his own office. John Dykstra crafted a camera that could be used with a PDPII, a small computer with no more power than today's hand-held calculators. But it was enough to control the camera shutter and the dolly, based on how an object should move through space.

But much of the effects work presented in *Star Wars* had been around a long time. Matte painting, interfacing a real image with a carefully composited painting, had first been used in still photography by Norman Dawn in 1905. Dawn went on to make a short film using mattes (*California Mission)* and was still working in pictures as late as the 1950s in *Two Lost Worlds,* which he directed.

The VistaVision camera was literally the last of its kind, the same kind of camera used to film the expansive visions of Hitchcock's *North by Northwest* (MGM, color, 1959, 136 min.). Front projection, projecting film onto a matte painted on glass, was also used, a new variation of the rear-projection technique pioneered by Willis O'Brien in *The Lost World* (1925). And the blue screen, used to great effect in *The Invisible Man* (1933), would become a *Star Wars* series staple, from the land speeders on Tatooine to the breakneck speeder bike scene in the forest of Endor. An optical printer, not used since the making of *The Ten Commandments,* was tracked down and used to combine shots with startling reality.

Sound was given unusual importance. *Star Wars* was filmed at the Elstree Studios, the same studio used by young Hitchcock, isolated in Borehamwood, England. This gave Lucas an unusual opportunity to control the sound. Lucas adopted the then-new Dolby Stereo process for reduced tape hiss and an expanded dynamic sound range — audio headroom that *Star Wars* took advantage of.

Key to *Star Wars*'s sound effects was Ben Burtt. Burtt had been recommended to producer Gary Kurtz by Lucas's former sound instructor at USC, Ken Miura. Described as a "sound genius" by Miura, Burtt was hired to create the sounds of *Star Wars.* Both Lucas and Burtt wanted to break away from the electronic, synthesized sounds of SF films. "The

sounds of the real world are complicated and dirty," Burtt said. "They simply cannot be reproduced on a synthesizer."

Using a Nagra tape recorder, Burtt recorded jet engines, static, a four-month-old bear, his blender, anything, searching for the right sound. Burtt categorized the picture's sounds: voices, weapons, vehicles, doors, screams, and even footsteps. Burtt sent tapes to Lucas, suggesting possible match-ups of sounds and effects.

Composer John Williams, an Oscar winner for his score for *Jaws* (1975), composed 90 minutes of original music for *Star Wars,* overriding Lucas's wish to use classical pieces. Williams argued that the film required a new, fresh, and heroic score. Like much of the sound, it added immeasurably to the "experience."

Costumes and makeup assumed major importance. The sleek Imperial storm troopers were inspired by the police in Lucas's *THX 1138,* but were designed, along with Darth Vader, by Ralph McQuarrie. There were over a dozen different alien creatures in the cantina scene, designed by a team headed by Phil Tippett and Jon Berg. The rubbery creatures of *Star Trek* and the countless creatures of producer Joseph Stefano's *Outer Limits* were history.

Berg and Tippett also created the *Star Wars*'s holographic chess game by using miniature creatures and stop-motion animation. As a boy, Berg had been scared and enthralled by *Mighty Joe Young* (1949) and the stop-motion work of Willis O'Brien and Ray Harryhausen. Miniatures were used for both split-screen shots and blue-screen work, but only a meager 50 models were required — a number that would grow in subsequent sequels.

There were, altogether, over 365 separate effects shots, and when the picture was finally screened for test audiences, the effects — the land speeder cruising over the desert, the tie fighters making their run at the death star, and the whole dizzying pace of it all — worked wonderfully.

But for all the innovation, there was a recognition among Lucas's technicians that they were in a long line of SF filmmakers. "Méliès's films," John Dykstra said, "employed nearly every effect currently used at Industrial Light and Magic." Phil Hardy compares Lucas's achievement to Kubrick's in *2001:* "Stanley Kubrick went back to silent film techniques to generate a sense of spectacle in which still cameras watched seemingly impossible objects move in space. Lucas's special effects (which were only possible due to the computer-controlled camera developed by John Dykstra), like early American cinema, stress motion and movement above all."

With the incredible success of *Star Wars, Newsweek* drew the obvious conclusion: "The more intense the experience, the more successful the film." In the wake of *Star Wars,* Paramount Pictures scrapped its original plans for *Star Trek: The Motion Picture* and refigured the film's budget for a full-scale effects extravaganza.

After *Star Wars,* special effects would be a coordinated, large-scale business, sent out of studio to experts to make the vision come to life with all the power the budget could stand. In the light of this film's success, the special-effects technicians of *Star Wars* went on to other films, where their work was all-important. Some opened their own effects workshops. John Dykstra set up Apogee, and Richard Edlund, who won an Academy Award for *Star Wars,* eventually started Boss Effects.

There are nay-sayers. Danny Peary criticizes the film's two-dimensional characters. "That they're shallow isn't as annoying as knowing they were designed to be that way." Harlan Ellison says he hates *Star Wars,* crediting it with, "all the smarts of a matzoh ball." Critics have also complained about the excessive merchandising and the fact that the film makes war look like fun.

But Lucas's film is, as described by Phil Hardy, "a radical shift from the bittersweet questioning of tendencies within modern society to an unabashed celebration of escapism, gee-whiz heroics, and innocence."

And that is exactly what George Lucas wanted to do. "Instead of making 'isn't it terrible, what's happening to society?' movies, I decided to fill that gap. In other words, for two hours, they could forget." But not just for two hours. *Star Wars* encouraged repeated viewings. People saw the film over and over again — a phenomenon Hollywood would come to depend on for real blockbusters.

It's interesting that Stephen Spielberg's *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* (Columbia, color, 1977, 135 min.) opened the same year as *Star Wars,* but to generally cautious reviews. *Saturday Night Live*'s "anchorman," Chevy Chase, even joked about the impact the big-budget film's apparent failure would have on Columbia Pictures. Although the story of Roy Neary (played by Richard Dreyfus) had holes and logical gaps, it didn't matter. *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* was, if anything, more of a sound and light show than *Star Wars.* John Belton, in an article for *The Perfect Vision,* described Stephen Spielberg's oeuvre thus: "Spielberg's films, for example, curiously resemble Disneyland rides, designed to provide thrills almost programmatically."

When I saw *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* in a theater equipped with Dolby Sound, I was startled by the sound of the engines of the lost planes of Flight 19 roaring to life. When people were "buzzed" by convoys of UFOs, the sound filled the theater. And, of course, the arrival of the mother ship at the end rumbled as if it were about to knock out the walls of the theater. It was all great fun.

The images on the screen matched the sounds, with a dizzying display of billowing clouds parting to reveal brilliant UFOs that looked as real as the 7-11 store down the street. When Roy Neary deserts his family and climbs Devil's Tower, we know he's answering a higher calling. The scientists (played by Bob Balaban and director Francois Truffaut) recognize that Neary has been chosen to come to this place.

After the mother ship releases a crowd of displaced people picked up from various times and lands, Neary has his close encounter with an anemic-looking (but very peaceful) alien. John Williams's music swells — again, an important component — and the alien blinks his eyes and extends his hand. Neary is led on ship, his arms outstretched.

Close Encounters of the Third Kind exorcises the alien paranoia of the 1950s. It is a film rooted in good, hopeful feelings, where alien contact must inevitably be a religious experience. Spielberg also recognized the UFO community, including UFO researcher Dr. J. Allen Hynek in the film and modeling Truffaut's character on French UFO expert Jacques Valée.

Though *Variety* described the film as "lacking the warmth and humanity of *Star Wars* . . . with a flawed story," the

audience didn't seem to care. It became one of the top five, most successful films of all time.

Douglas Trumball headed the effects team, choreographing the dozens of spaceships that arrive at Devil's Tower. The scale of the final scene, when the UFO flotilla arrives, necessitated the construction of the largest indoor set to date. Inside an old dirigible hangar in Mobile, Alabama, with 10 million cubic feet, were brought four miles of scaffolding, 18,000 square feet of fiberglass, and enough concrete to make a full-scale replica of the Washington Monument.

If *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* is a blissful view of alien contact, then *Alien* (Fox/Brandywine-Ronald Shusett Productions, color, 1979, 117 min.) is a stiff corrective. *Alien* owes more to the legion of B-horror movies and H. P. Lovecraft than traditional SF. And, as it's been pointed out many times, its plot (written by Dan O'Bannon) closely apes the 1950s film *It! The Terror from Beyond Space.*

Alien was directed by Ridley Scott, who brought a new edge to filmmaking. Scott had directed hundreds of commercials, many award-winning and some considered classics. He crafted 30-second or one-minute dramas designed to manipulate the viewer. It was a technique he openly admitted using in *Alien.* "It employs the ultimate science of viewer manipulation — a lot of psychological elements I learned in advertising. . . ."

The manipulation begins as soon as the film starts. The beat-up interior of the commerical vessel *Nostromo* has a dingy, sinister look. The camera prowls through the ship, stopping, hesitating, as if something dangerous must be lurking there already. When the *Nostromo*'s crew is revived to investigate a message from a nearby planet, they first eat, bantering with each other about "bonus" shares while two dunking geese toys go up and down on the mess table.

But despite the carefree talk, the camera brings out tension, lingering on a crew member's face, going close. We discover that the dialogue isn't important; the real message of the story is in what we *see.*

But once the crew members are on the planet, they find a nightmarish world of storms and an enormous biomechanic ship. From here on, the audience is privy to the vision of H. R. Giger — an experience they're not likely to forget. When Scott first saw Giger's designs, especially the prototype alien from Giger's book *Necronomicon,* he said, "I've never really been so shook up by anything." The abandoned alien ship, with its desiccated pilot in a massive chair, looks like a monstrous carcass, which is how Giger perhaps wanted it. "Everything I designed in the film used the idea of bones," Giger said.

The film gets much of its tension from two key initial shocks. First, the character played by John Hurt comes upon a sunken chamber filled with barnacle-like eggs. As one egg opens up, he looks in. Suddenly, the facehugger, a crablike stage of the alien, smashes through his face plate, covering his face.

Later, back on the ship, the hugger releases Hurt and appears to be dead. This leads to the festive dinner. Hurt starts coughing and spasming until he flips onto the table and the chestburster appears, chewing a hole right through his chest. At this point, some people might have had enough of the alien.

Amazingly enough, there is not much in the way of graphic violence in

the rest of the film. Other gruesome scenes were filmed but were wisely not used. Scott has his audience on edge and keeps them there by giving only fleeting glimpses of the marauding alien. Even though all the crew members fall prey to the alien (save Sigourney Weaver's charaeter Ripley), there's little actual gore. The anticipation is more than enough, and every bump and curve of the ship make us think that, yes, there it is: in the corner, in the ceiling, everywhere. Even when Ripley, escaping in the *Nostromo*'s shuttle, blows the alien into space, we doubt that the creature is *really* dead.

One problem plagued director Ridley Scott from the film's inception: "the man in the rubber suit" issue. However, the alien's head, designed by Carlo Rambaldi, dispelled the idea that this was just a man in a suit. The alien was a breakthrough in extraterrestrial realism. *Alien* also uses much backlighting and glare to create a murky, cluttered environment, filled with shadowy lines. The *Nostromo*'s lights flicker on, planting the subconscious thought that already technology is no match for the alien.

Producer David Giler called his film a "nasty *Star Wars.*" With its Sleeping Beauty ending (Ripley and Jones, the cat, in the sleeping pod), the audience again finds itself in a world of fable and fairy tale. Only this time it's a dark tale of bone-crunching monsters and a space-age labyrinth.

Here are some recommended books and sources for the key films.

Industrial Light & Magic: The Art of Special Effects (Ballantine, 1986) is a coffee-table book that presents the Lucas's effects company. It includes gorgeous gate-fold photographs and the story of effects found in films ranging from *Star Wars* (and *Star Trek*) to *Poltergeist.*

Skywalking (Ballantine, 1983) is an entertaining biography of Lucas up to 1986 and prior to *Howard the Duck* and *Willow.* It's especially good in its coverage of the troubles that plagued the *Star Wars* shoot.

The magazine *Cinefantastique* ran a special issue devoted to *Alien,* with interviews with H. R. Giger and Ridley Scott. Back issues are available from *Cinefantastique,* P.O. Box 270, Oak Park IL 60303.

Michel Ciment's book *Kubrick* (Holt Rinehart Winston, 1980) includes a lengthy interview with Kubrick on *A Clockwork Orange,* as well as a number of stills from the film.

Danny Peary's *Guide for the Film Fanatic* (Fireside Books, 1986) continues to provide interesting commentary, as does Phil Hardy's *Science Fiction, the Film Encyclopedia* (William Morrow & Co., Inc., 1984).

THX 1138 and *A Clockwork Orange* are available on cassette from Warner Home Video. The restored version of *The Man Who Fell to Earth* has just been issued by RCA/Columbia Home Video. *Star Wars* is available from CBS Fox in both tape and LaserDisc formats, with laser recommended for the quality of image and sound. There is a special CAV (standard-play) version on LaserDisk that allows study of special effects. Also, there's a Japanese import of *Star Wars* on LaserDisc with the original aspect, full-screen format. CBS Fox has *Alien* on tape and disc. Finally, *Close Encounters — The Special Edition,* with additional footage showing Dreyfus inside the alien vessel, is offered in both tape and LaserDisc formats by RCA/Columbia.

THE DEVIL AND ROY BEAN

by James Collett
art: Hank Jankus

James Collett is a native West Texan, descended from an early-day rancher in the area of Sheffield, Texas. The author has taught social studies at McCamey High School for the past twelve years. He holds a Master's Degree in History from the University of Texas.

One of his hobbies is historical research, which he often uses in his writing. He has written several articles for True West *magazine on West Texas history. This is his first fiction sale, historical or otherwise, to* Amazing® Stories.

I had the distinct feeling that Joaquin Morales' house had been there, standing off the wilderness, long before the rest of Langtry grew up against it. Possessed with a dilapidated permanence, the house sat at an obstinate angle to the rest of the street, fronting the Rio Grande and the Mexican mountains beyond, rather than the town. Wind- and rain-scarred adobe showed through in several spots, like bones beneath the skin of a drying carcass. The plaster, where it remained, had been baked to a butterscotch yellow in the vicious West Texas sun. Most of Langtry had again died, while the house lived on. That is, if houses live. Joaquin's certainly had a gaunt, tough vitality.

My pursuit of Roy Bean had carried me to this singular spot. I always contended that, somewhere amongst the legends, there existed at least one good folktale about Roy Bean and the Devil. Anyone credited with that much hell-raising just naturally had to be on a first-name basis with Satan. Sweating and squinting in the glare of the alkali street, with a trace of sulphur in the hot breeze, I began to question the validity of continuing. There is such a thing as getting too close to one's subject.

However, my academic reputation and a half-completed dissertation were on the line. So, armed with a new tape recorder and a degree in anthropology, I set out to find the story; which, of course, I did. I also found Joaquin Morales.

The logical place to search was Langtry, on the outside chance some old Texan still survived there with a decent story or two about Judge Bean. The odds were small, but they were the only odds in town.

A ride in on the Southern Pacific would have provided the most fitting entrance, but no passenger train had stopped in Langtry for years. I settled for an exhausted station wagon from the university's fleet; it smelled of geologists.

Langtry looked much as it always had — squat structures of adobe, wood, and tin, squeezed between the Rio Grande and the railroad. I made the obligatory pilgrimage to the state park and toured the heart of Judge Bean's domain. Everything was far too antiseptic; the life had been sanitized out of it. Even the brittle husk of the Jersey Lilly held only the slightest whiff, the smallest taste, of its reckless past.

The situation became less auspicious as the day wore on. I asked around the old Texaco station up the hill without success. A pair of leathery ranchers offered some interesting epithets, but they weren't the quarry I sought. The tourist trap, adjacent to the park, proved even more sterile, unless one preferred polished agate or rubber tomahawks.

My final option was the small hamburger place across the street. The waitress took me for another tourist, though slightly more demented than most. She seemed relieved to escape when a party of Californians assaulted the place.

I might have returned home empty-handed if Sabino Gonzales had not been down to his last beer. Scenting the possibility of more drinks, he called me over. An excruciating and expensive loosening of his tongue put me on the path to the home of Joaquin Morales.

I hesitantly approached the screened-in porch. The rusted mesh gave the house a bared-teeth, feral quality. The early afternoon shadows within revealed little of what awaited me. At my first timorous knock, a voice from the porch invited me, "Come in, señor." I had the fleeting impression I had been expected.

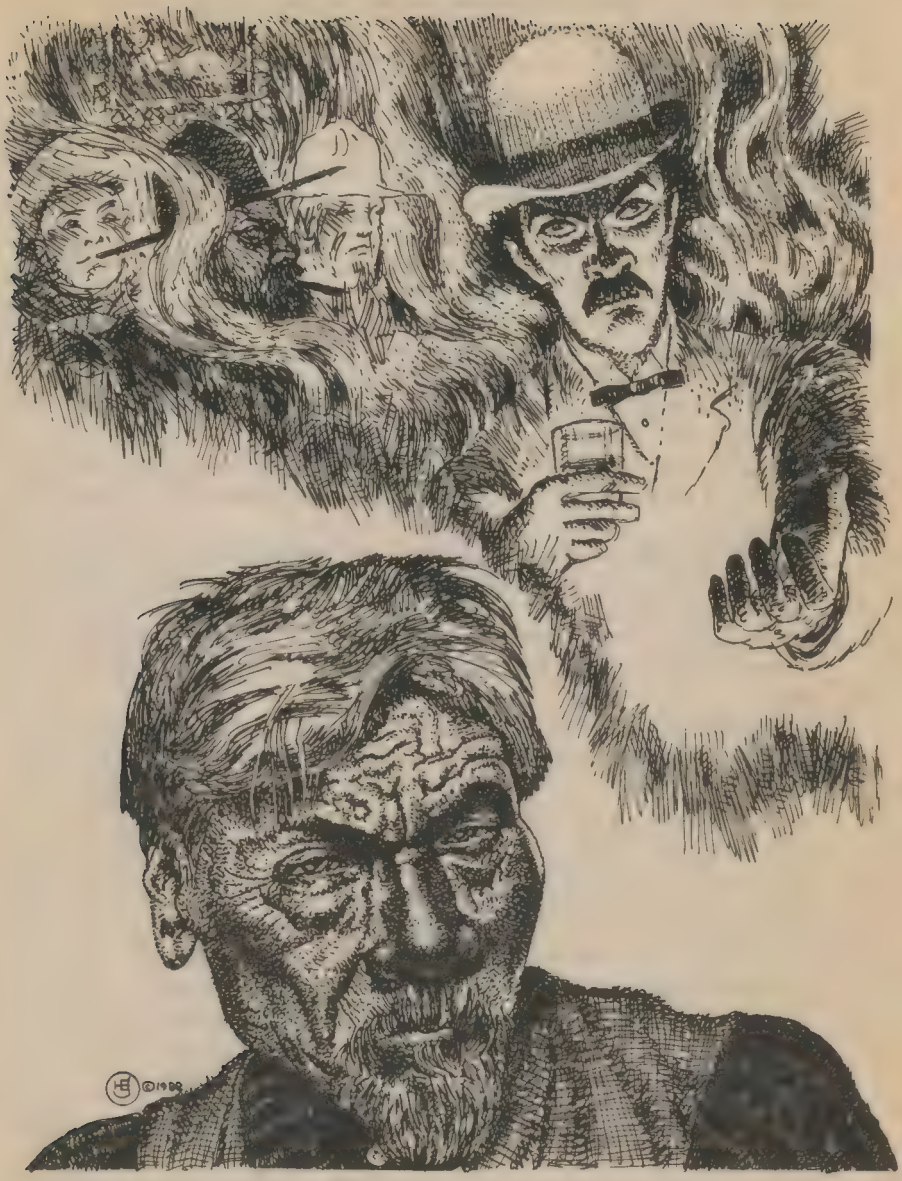
Inside, the shadowed porch offered a pleasant contrast to the desert. The hard alkaline glare dimmed, while the stark beauty of the view remained. The arid breeze cooled as it sifted through the mesh of the screen. There was a feeling of oasis, of counterpoint.

An old man sat at the back of the porch. He occupied one of a pair of chairs that flanked a small table covered with clean white linen. A pitcher of deep blue crockery sat on the table, beads of moisture tracing delicate lines down its sides. Two glasses of the same blue material stood upended beside the pitcher. The chairs were Mexican leather, hand-stretched over a frame of willow limbs. Slick with hours of sitting, they exuded an irresistible comfortableness.

Joaquin Morales sat quietly as I approached. He made no effort to rise, only indicated with a slight gesture that I sit in the other chair. The leather accepted me with a surprising familiarity, deliciously refreshing after the plastic seats of the station wagon.

The old man poured us both a drink from the pitcher, which proved to be filled with the freshest, coldest water I have ever tasted. I concluded he had his own well because no other water in Langtry (or West Texas, for that matter) remotely approached it.

He listened politely while I stumbled through my apologetic explanation,



justifying the disturbance of his afternoon. He sat back in his worn leather chair as if he had nothing better to do than listen to a slightly demented *gringo*. His eyes sparked a time or two, and his lips twitched in what I feared was irritation or anger.

Joaquin was a small, wiry Mexican, with skin as worn and leathery as his chair. The Indian in his blood showed in the angles of his jaw. Hair whitened in contrast to the swarthy complexion of his skin, he was clearly an old man. Yet, like the house curled against the backs of our chairs, he projected a startling vitality.

His eyes, however, proved to be the most remarkable thing about him. They had a sharp, piercing quality, like those of a bird of prey. Hunter's eyes, they searched out the rabbit in me.

Yet, in the same moment, his eyes radiated a powerful sense of wisdom — dangerous wisdom. They held knowledge of things far beyond what one expected of some old Mexican man on the near side of nowhere. Sage's eyes, they frightened me.

Joaquin's silence increased my uneasiness. I began to feel an unwelcome intruder. The sense of invitation vanished like a thin cloud in the noonday glare.

The wall behind me warmed slightly as if the house were beginning to rouse itself. The back of my neck crawled with the unnerving thought that, if I turned to look, I would see something that would chill my blood. I wanted desperately to conclude my comments and depart. Yet, I also feared to move. One misstep and the house, like a great beast, would pounce upon me.

I fumbled into silence, searching my frightened memory for a suitable exit. Joaquin seemed oblivious of my anxiety. He sat idly observing the great crack in the hills carved by the Rio Grande during the centuries of its passage by his door. At last, he spoke.

Strangely, his words dissipated my fears. He had a soft, melodious voice that sat easily in the corners of my ears. I suddenly felt foolish, embarrassed to have ever been afraid of him or his house. Nevertheless, I took one quick glance of reassurance at the butternut stucco behind me. Joaquin's mouth twitched again, and this time, I recognized the traces of a smile.

"I was born in this hard country," he told me. "I have lived here for most of my many long years. I grew to manhood playing along the river, beneath those bluffs. My brother Jesus drowned in its muddy waters, just above that bend. They found his body a week later down near Comstock. My father sent me away with great dreams. But my destiny was here."

He paused a moment in reflection, his gaze directed outward, before he continued. "My father was Pedro Morales. He worked for the judge, cleaning the spittoons and sweeping the floors. He is mentioned in one of the books they wrote about Señor Bean. Most of that book is lies, but the part about my father is true.

"He wanted more for his son, so he sent me to law school. He never stopped to consider the audacity required in those days to be a Mexican lawyer in Texas. He believed men of learning would be above such things as racism. It broke his heart when I came home, bitter and emptied. I attempted to explain what had happened — the insults, the shunning of the 'wetback lawyer' — but it was too much for him to accept. He died shortly thereafter.

"I turned to the work my people had always done; I became a vaquero. I rode for the Triple Cross for more years than I wish to recall. That was no easy thing, Señor, to have a head full of law and live among cactus and coyotes."

He chuckled, then fell silent a moment. I sat unmoving, fascinated. A locust began its bony melody in a nearby ocotillo. I detected a wariness in the house, unsure yet if I was friend or foe.

"I carried a copy of Blackstone's *Commentaries* in my saddlebags. I often quoted it to the cattle by moonlight or firelight. They paid me no more attention than did the *gringo* judges."

He stopped. His face grew harder, its leathery lines tightening. The eyes narrowed in the hunt. The wall of the house suddenly grew hard against my back. The ache of fear stabbed through my palms. Then, his bitter reverie ended, he calmed me once more with his voice and told me what I had come to hear.

"My father was there when Señor Bean took the Devil to court," he began. "He saw it with his own eyes. He was a good man, and a good father, God rest his soul, and he would not have lied about so important a thing.

"He first told me the story when I and my brothers and sisters were *niños*. He repeated it, when we asked him, for many years. It became a favorite of ours. We learned its contours, like a country in which one has lived for many years. We considered it a family possession, a bit of our inheritance.

"My children, they never cared for it. Grandfather was a toothless old Mexican, too backward for them. They had no time for him. They were embarrassed by the *viejo*. Embarrassed! He was too polite to the *gringos*; he had sold his machismo. That's how much the little fools knew.

"They are gone now. They ran off to Del Rio and San Antonio and no longer come home. Papa is too old-fashioned also. So I will give the story to you, señor, as my father gave it to me. All I ask is a little of your time for an old man. If there were anyone left to treasure it, I would not be sharing it with you. Perhaps you will not entirely ruin it, or give it away too cheaply."

Eagerly, I dragged out my recorder, wrestling with cords and buttons. Joaquin gently restrained me with his hand. "No, señor," he said. "We will do this the old way, the best way. The story must pass from person to person — from the storyteller to the listener. That is best, no?"

I could only nod in agreement, not wanting to goad him into silence or refusal. Judging by the steel in his grip, I did not want to goad him into anything. He smiled and added, "When you lock them up in those little machines, the stories die a little bit."

He leaned back in his chair and looked into the river country once more. The edges of the sky bleached into an alkali-blue. The rough-edged hills of Mexico crouched just across the border in parched, resentful meanness. Several locust joined into an eerie droning chorus in the bone-drying heat. The house stirred slightly behind me as it curled up for a nap in the afternoon sun.

The silence lengthened until I was certain Joaquin had changed his mind. I struggled to find the right words of apology. Then, in the manner of the true storyteller, he began when my anticipation reached the precipice.

The old ones claim there is a cave near Ojinaga, just across the river from Presidio, that is one of the doors of Hell. So it was natural for Satan to use the Southern Pacific, as he was frequently in San Antonio and Austin on business, especially when the Texas legislature was in session. Things were easier for him in those days. Now, with all the lobbyists, it's no longer worth his time. The going price for a legislator's soul has become too high for such an invaluable commodity.

In those times, the Devil went to and fro in the earth in the guise of a traveling salesman. He carried a worn leather valise, filled with contracts and souls.

No one knows the first time he stopped in Langtry. He was obviously familiar with the place by the time he came to the judge's attention. When he chose, he appeared no more than another of the small-scale businessmen who eked out a living riding the rails and hawking the wares of their masters in the financial capitals of the East.

My father and Roy Bean both met the Devil the same day — one hot, dusty afternoon in late July. The place, of course, was Judge Roy Bean's infamous saloon, the Jersey Lilly.

By the time he and the Devil met in that establishment, Roy Bean was past his prime. The more unnerving misadventures of his life had whitened his beard, except where the tobacco stains kept it darker. He carried a bit more ballast from too many days and nights behind a bar or a poker table. In his straw hat, suspenders hitching up rumpled pants, he appeared harmless enough. But he was still a man to be reckoned with, and the only law along a vast stretch of the lower Pecos.

That afternoon, Señor Bean was overseeing his domain from behind the bar, dispensing drinks with the same quick dispatch he often did justice when he sat in court at the selfsame place. The week had been slow and pleasantly dull, for Langtry. A new bullet hole in the counter provided the only conversation piece. The Friday afternoon train offered diversion, as well as the opportunity to separate a few passengers from a portion of their wealth.

My father might never have noticed Satan if the crowd had been larger. From his vantage point at the corner table, he could survey the entire room

while he polished the brass spittoons. He had lost interest in the poker game across the saloon, where three cowboys were steadily losing their hard-earned dollars to a cardsharp from El Paso, who Judge Bean would either fine or bury before Monday morning.

A breeze stirred the alkali outside. On the chalky smell drifting in through the open door, Pedro caught a whiff of something dead, bloated by the blazing heat. He looked up from his cleaning and saw the stranger.

He was a slender man, with a knife-edged leanness. He wore a black derby and carried a dark jacket over one arm. In the other hand, he held a black leather valise, filled with papers. His pinstriped shirt and starched collar looked as fresh as if he had just donned them.

His eyebrows and hair were so coal-black it was like looking into the dead of night. By contrast, his face was pale, almost milky, though slightly flushed from the heat. He gave no indication of sickliness, however.

He carried no visible weapons, yet several in the room who knew of such things recognized him as deadly, including my father. Pedro had survived employment in the Jersey Lilly by learning to recognize a few of the dangers of the job. Señor Bean was busy with his customers and missed the man's entrance.

The stranger casually surveyed the room and its occupants. When his gaze swept over my father, it gave him the sensation of a cold reptile slithering across his heart. He felt chilled despite the heat.

The drummer easily found a place at the bar. Those nearest him unconsciously moved farther away. He smiled to himself as he listened to the bustle and brag of the bartender.

The judge soon noticed him. He read something in the man while he drew up another beer, but the stranger appeared less deadly than he had at the door. Another customer drew Señor Bean away, and he took no more notice of the drummer until the man prepared to leave.

The stranger paid with a newly minted gold piece, so fresh it glittered even in the dingy afternoon light of the saloon. The judge's eyes narrowed greedily. A smile shifted the corners of his tobacco-stained beard as he deftly raked the coin into the Corona box that served as a cash drawer.

The drummer politely awaited his change. Señor Bean became extremely busy, wiping intensely at a spot of grease permanently embedded in the bar. The seconds ticked by as the silence grew.

Finally, the stranger, in a voice whose politeness was slightly strained, requested, "My change, if you please?"

Judge Bean frowned and hitched his suspenders. He dropped his rag and slowly withdrew the cigar box from beneath the counter. He fumbled amongst the silver coins and pesos as if in earnest search, but he never brought out any change.

Then he heard the signal he had been awaiting — the whistle-shriek of the departing train. Passengers scurried for the door. Only seconds remained

before the train pulled out of Langtry for El Paso.

Triumphantly, Roy Bean tossed several coins on the bar and growled, "Train's leavin'." The coins were all pesos, far short of the proper change. Any mark who sought to count them or offer argument would miss his train. The judge had polished this deal until his con was a work of art.

This time, however, the stranger neither grabbed the money and bolted nor started to complain. He simply stood there, his smile icing, and repeated his request, "My change, please."

Judge Bean glared at him, beard a-bristle. He declared in his fiercest tones. "That's it! Get goin'. Train's leavin'!" As if to support his words, the whistle shrieked again.

That's when things turned strange. The whistle shrilled on, but the pitch went wrong. The air itself suddenly thickened. Pedro watched a cold fear grip the judge in his ample stomach. Bean locked eyes with the stranger, but slowly, as if he were struggling to move them through molasses. The whistle screamed on, tortured beyond its normal limits.

Then the judge's eyes focused on the card players, and he realized the extent of his danger. The cowboys moved in a sick parody of normality. The cardsharp was dealing to a Circle-J cowboy. He flipped the card across the table with a long-practiced flick of the wrist. This time, however, it hung eerily in the air, reluctant to fall.

Pedro began a gesture of blessing. To his horror, he found his hand numbed and slowed with paralysis. Worse, the move drew the attention of the stranger. He wheeled, moving smoothly through the moment in which the others struggled. His look of hatred withered the desire for grace in my father's mind. For a long, terribly empty moment, Pedro could not recall the thought of God. He fell through the abyss of atheism. Then, the stranger turned back to the judge, and my father collapsed, spent, into his chair.

The stranger's grin had become sardonic. Slowly, he extended his hand and repeated, "My change, if you please?" He spoke in a normal tone, while the whistle stretched its agony out toward eternity and the five of diamonds slid through the air like a dust mote.

The realization slowly overtook Roy Bean that he was dealing with a far greater meanness than his own. The hair on the back of his neck stood out in fear. Desperately, he groped for change and found his movements had returned to normal.

Bean grabbed the devil's gold piece and flung it on the counter. He gasped out, "Drink's on me," then stumbled back against the wall of the Jersey Lilly.

The stranger nodded his thanks and turned to leave. The whistle regained its own voice, dying into exhausted silence, while the five of diamonds fell like a lead weight onto the torn green felt of the card table. The judge glanced warily at the door, but the Devil was gone, safely aboard the 4:27 to the border of Hell.

It didn't take long for the judge and the Devil to become better acquainted. If you stretched the meaning a bit, they even developed a friendship, something like that between a scorpion and a rattlesnake.

My father did not witness the deal between Roy Bean and the Devil. I doubt anyone beyond the two of them did; or, if they did, lived to tell of it. It was only by the best of fortunes they never knew what my father had seen.

Pedro realized one day that the judge had bargained away his soul. He was led to this conclusion gradually; no single thing gave it away. A new crease or two scarred the lines of the judge's face. He grew a little less substantial, wearing an air of transparency, as if part of him were not there.

The thing that convinced my father was the judge's exuberance. For weeks, he wore the smug look he always got when he bested someone in a deal. He fairly glowed with pleasure, especially when he spoke of Lily Langtry.

My father also held no doubt regarding the terms of the bargain. If one knew the judge, it was not hard to determine what Señor Bean would wish in return for his soul. Money, power, fame — he had his share of those. These might be in amounts smaller than most would desire, but they were adequate to the grandeur of the judge's dreams. His domain might be small and filled with more scorpions, vinegarroons, and scoundrels than any equal patch of earth, but it was, without a doubt, completely his. He lorded over it more absolutely than the greatest of despots.

Judge Roy Bean had traded his soul for Lily Langtry; she had won his heart long before. The judge loved the famous English actress from the first time he laid eyes on her picture.

Somehow, a handbill portrait of Miss Langtry ended up in the end-of-track den of iniquity once known as Vinegarroon. The Southern Pacific was under construction. Roy Bean was busily carving out his reputation and his empire. As the only justice of the peace in a hundred miles, his word was absolute. He meted out swift and merciless justice, when necessary, and the Texas Rangers backed his play.

Legend has it that the picture was among the effects of the first man he hanged. Whatever the case, it was love at first sight. Thus began the judge's lifelong devotion to Lily Langtry, the Jersey Lilly.

The judge carried on a rather one-sided correspondence with the lady and bestowed upon her all the gifts at his command. He named the town that sprouted from the blood-stained roots of Vinegarroon after her. Perhaps the most dubious honor of all came when the notorious and dilapidated pile of wood and tin he called a saloon was christened the Jersey Lilly.

So Judge Bean traded the Devil his soul for Miss Lily Langtry, but on his terms. His heart's desire was for the actress to come to him and see, first-hand, the monument he had erected in her name.

For a time, Bean was blissfully happy. He accumulated several new portraits, one even signed by Miss Langtry herself, and prominently displayed

them in his saloon and billiard hall. He knowingly claimed she was on her way to Langtry. Why, the next paper from San Antonio would tell of her new tour through Texas. Naturally, she would stop by to visit her old friend, Roy Bean, on her way to El Paso.

Then, despite so grand a deal, the doubts began. Even Señor Bean had to wonder if eternal torment was too great a price for his heart's desire. Besides, as a poker player, he knew there was an outside chance that Lily Langtry might stop during a tour of the West, without the assistance of Satan.

My father always suspected Bean's uncertainties stemmed from an incident at one of his executions. The judge had drawn a good-sized crowd for the ceremonies to be performed at the hanging tree across the railroad tracks. A young horse thief sat astride his stolen goods, noose around his neck, beneath the large cottonwood.

The judge concluded his pompous speech on the wages of sin and horseflesh. When he came to the words, "May God have mercy on your soul," his voice broke. His face darkened and he struggled for air like something was caught in his throat. His deputies rushed over, but he waved them off in a choking wheeze.

He never finished the statement. After that, he passed judgment with a swift, "Hang him!" He claimed his heart just wasn't in it anymore, which, of course, was the gospel truth.

The judge wrestled with his problem a long time. Being Roy Bean, he wasn't about to admit defeat. The struggle took its toll, however. He lost interest in most things, except Miss Lily, and he gazed upon her portraits with bittersweet longing.

The change, when it came, was obvious to many. Only my father suspected the reason. Judge Bean had found a way to beat the Devil. He began to strut about with his old air of arrogance. He returned to wholesale fleecing and entertainment of the pilgrims who wandered into his lair. And he sent Charlie Stark on a little errand.

My father stumbled into their conversation quite by accident. During the colder days of the year, he worked late cleaning the billiard room. That way, he drew the greatest possible benefit from the cast-iron stove in the corner. The judge had no complaint about this. He paid Pedro the same wage, regardless, and the billiard room stayed clean.

On this particular evening, Pedro wandered into the bar from his chores without realizing the seriousness of the meeting underway. Silence fell immediately and both men glared at him. My father mumbled an apology and fled. Charlie Stark was no man to trifle with.

Everyone knew Deputy Stark was the meanest man in Langtry. Even the judge kept his distance. No one had any idea how many men he had killed. Several were buried in the hard, dry earth of the Langtry cemetery. According to one tale, John Wesley Hardin had backed away from a showdown with him.

Next morning, when my father arrived at work, the judge was exuberant, whistling to himself. Charlie Stark was nowhere to be found. For the next several weeks, his whereabouts remained unknown. Pedro had no idea where he'd gone — until the year's end.

My father saw the Devil for the last time on a bitterly cold New Year's Eve. He had fallen asleep in the billiard room, huddled beside the stove. Outside an icy wind was blowing, so cold Texans call it a 'Blue Norther." From time to time, a flurry of sleet would rake the top of the Jersey Lilly. The frigid air pried its way in through every crack and crevice in the old building.

Pedro was awakened by the sound of his name. It was the judge, speaking from the next room. "Close the damn door, Pedro," he heard Roy Bean say.

Groggily, my father stumbled to his feet. Shivering from the cold, he wandered to the connecting door. Something stopped him; he was never certain what. He simply knew he did not want to go into the other room. Instead, he peered through a crack in the wall. What he saw chilled him deeper than the blasts of north wind shaking the Jersey Lilly.

The Devil stood just inside the door of the saloon. My father had no trouble recognizing him by this time, despite the differences in his wardrobe.

Satan was dressed as a drover, fresh from riding some God-forsaken range. He wore a wide-brimmed black felt hat, pulled down tight against the wind. Around his neck was a matching black bandana. His shirt was a bright blood-red.

He wore black chaps, inlaid with conchos of pure silver, and stained with soot and ashes. Arcane symbols were stitched into them, but, when you tried to read them, they writhed and blurred until they could not be made out. His boots were tanned hide. My father was afraid to look at them too closely. Great silver spurs, with cruel Mexican rowels, were strapped across his boots.

The Devil turned to close the door, through which an arctic wind poured. My father caught a fleeting glimpse of a great black horse, with eyes of burning coals, breath steaming in the frozen night.

Judge Bean had been sitting in the saloon, nursing his thoughts, weighing the endings of one year and the beginnings of another. When the door opened behind him, he had blamed my father for letting in the cold, dead breath of the dying year. His growl had awakened Pedro. Now, they both stared in shock at the apparition before them.

The Devil broke the silence. "I received your message, Judge. I'm here to answer your summons," his face darkened as he continued, "though I did not care for its peremptory nature."

He strolled to the bar with the leisurely stealth of a great cat. When the rowels of his spurs struck the floor, they kicked off blue-green sparks and left small burn marks in the floor resembling the two halves of a cloven hoof. As he passed the judge's table, he dropped a small leather pouch upon

it. "And I've brought the evidence."

The bag twitched slightly when its contents moved. The judge hungrily eyed the little poke, but did not touch it. He rubbed his hand across his chest a moment, as if it pained him.

Satan hooked his boot into the brass rail, leaned back against the bar, and rested his lanky elbows on its scarred surface. He gazed a moment without speaking at the poster of Lily Langtry on the wall.

Then, almost as an afterthought, he added, "I brought your messenger as well." He slowly opened his hand. A trickle of ashes and bone chips grew into a small mound on the counter.

Eyes widening, the judge sat up in his chair. He croaked, "Charlie?" My father gasped in horror when he realized the little pile on the bar was all that remained of the fearsome Charlie Stark.

Roy Bean slowly turned his gaze upon the Devil, his face noticeably paler. He spoke again, his voice even and deadly. "Deputy Stark was acting as an officer of my court."

The Devil snorted derisively. "He serves a different jurisdiction now," he replied.

The judge stroked his jaw, then he said, "That's exactly why I called you to my court. A little matter of jurisdiction." His eyes drifted to the pouch on the table.

"Let's be quick about it," the Devil commented dryly, "I have work to do on nights like this." In confirmation, the wind keened against the walls of the saloon.

Roy Bean rose slowly, looking as solemn and magisterial as possible. He walked boldly past the Devil, though he flinched slightly. He reached down behind the counter and brought up his worn copy of *The Revised Statutes of Texas* and laid it carefully on the counter. He brought out a battered notary public seal to place beside the lawbook.

He indicated Satan should be seated. The Devil gave a small shrug and complied. Señor Bean then pronounced, "This honorable court is now in session, Judge Roy Bean presiding. We are here tonight to consider the matter of an invalid contract for the soul of one Roy Bean, plaintiff —"

With a start, the devil interrupted, "What! Invalid contract! Why, you old fool, I'll —"

Summoning all the bravado he had, the judge continued, "It is the considered opinion of the plaintiff that said contract was illegally filed in a court that held questionable jurisdiction in such matters and that —"

The Devil grew visibly angry as Señor Bean continued. He interrupted again, "You haul me into your court, where the contract was recorded, to tell me it is invalid. On top of that, you have the audacity to act as both judge and plaintiff in a case involving an action of your court. Damn, Judge, if you don't beat all!"

The judge replied, "Yes sir, this here is only a justice of the peace court. I

have little authority in such weighty matters as souls."

"What about hangings, Judge?" the Devil countered. "You've decided the fate of a fair number of souls with those."

The judge's hand involuntary went to his neck. He caught himself and continued, "Nevertheless, a contract of such duration and magnitude would lie beyond the normal consideration of this court."

Again, the Devil parried, "What of weddings? Those are pretty powerful contracts of duration and magnitude. And divorces? You have even had the audacity to sunder a few of those you joined; quite illegally, I might add."

"A matter of corrective and expedient jurisprudence. I do hold with overturning insubstantial contracts."

"My contract is substantial, binding, and as valid as the blood with which it is signed."

"It is not valid in this court because I lack the authority to validate such a document. In fact, there is considerable question as to the existence and jurisdiction of said court, in all cases whatsoever."

Judge Bean then launched into a speech, part argument, part history, and part Roy Bean's fantasy. He threw in everything he could recall on the disputes regarding the Trans-Pecos country. He outlined the Spanish land grants and the disputes with Mexico that produced the Mexican War. He covered the articles of secession and the political battles of Reconstruction. He recounted the Indian raids from the mountains of Old Mexico. He detailed the accounts of lost treasures and outlaw strongholds. He even told a fairly accurate version of his election battles over his J. P. office.

The Devil sat unmoving in the old wooden chair as Roy Bean laid out his case. His visage grew so blackly evil my father feared he would set the Jersey Lilly ablaze with his look. Pedro wanted desperately to cross himself, but the gesture would reveal him to the Devil. He crouched in fear, shivering from the heat of the Devil's wrath.

Gradually, a sardonic smile slithered across Satan's face. He chuckled, then laughed — a bitter, spiteful laugh, more terrifying than his frown.

The judge halted in midsentence. His face set into a stony grimace. He paled, fear crouching in the corners of his eyes, but he held his ground. The floor boards of the saloon writhed beneath the Devil's mocking laugh. The judge stood, facing Satan like a poker player down to his last bluff, but too stubborn to throw in his hand.

Finally, the Devil's laughter died away. He eyed Señor Bean a moment more in silence. At last, he said, "Court's adjourned, Judge."

Bean opened his mouth to protest. Satan twitched his hand in a simple pattern. The evil magic filled my father with a deathly nausea. The judge's jaws moved, but only a strangled sound came forth, as if someone held him by the throat.

"You don't have a case and you know it!" Satan chided him. "I have your word, verified by a signature in your own blood. My contracts have been

ruled valid in more great and ancient courts than you can imagine. I have you, Judge, signed and sealed."

The Devil chuckled. "I do admire your sand, Bean," he said. "You're the first who argued against his own authority. Most dispensers of the law are too pompous to yield an inch of their jurisdiction, however questionably they obtained it. Even I didn't believe the Law West of the Pecos would pull down his own fences."

There was a moment of deathly silence, so cold and empty my father felt his fingers numbing. He never read the poet Dante, but, from that moment, Pedro always claimed the center of Hell was cold, filled with the icy emptiness of the Devil's hate.

Satan appeared to be weighing the situation. The judge stood immobile, neck extended, a grimace of pain on his face.

The Devil reached his decision. He looked so hard at Señor Bean the old man's face grew white as his beard. But, he held to his bluff, though he knew, this time, it was hollow.

"Maybe you're right," the Devil continued. "Maybe this paltry piece of dirt you rule isn't even fit for the Devil." The venom dripped from his words. "Maybe your word, your blood, isn't worth the Devil's time."

The judge's jaw tightened. He struggled to vent his anger, but only a gutteral sound emerged. The words died, strangled, in his throat.

"Still, you have proven useful, at times. You have expedited some special cases for me over the years." He glanced idly at the small mound on the bar. "Like old Charlie; not many come riding up to my front gate and call me out."

The Devil chuckled again. "Damn, Judge, you'd be too much trouble in Hell anyway. Why, in a thousand years, you'd have the place organized against me. The deal's off."

The relief was evident in Roy Bean's face when he found he could speak again. "You mean I got my soul back?"

"Yep. It's all yours again, though I doubt the shriveled thing is worth much." A sheet of parchment appeared in the Devil's hand, filled with several lines of neatly written script and a dark scrawl of dried blood.

The judge reached greedily for it. He quickly snatched his hand back as the paper blazed up in sooty flames. The leather pouch slowly deflated on the table. Bean rubbed his chest gingerly, a look of wonder on his face.

A hard light glittered in Roy Bean's eyes. He spoke, choosing his words carefully. "My word's as good as any man's. What about your word? Your half of the bargain? Seems to me you were well aware of the legal improprieties. I entered the bargain in good faith." He touched his chest. "I risked my immortal soul these last few years. I should receive some compensation for the wear and tear on the merchandise. The rules of equity indicate I'm entitled."

Surprisingly, the Devil wasn't angered this time. He smiled again and

seemed to be truly enjoying himself.

"Tell you what, Judge Roy Bean. I am an infinitely fairer man than most give me credit. I'll honor my bargain."

The twinkle grew in Señor Bean's eyes. It faltered, however, when Satan continued, "But only so far as the rules of equity require." The Devil leaned forward in his chair, and the malicious pleasure in his face sent the judge back a step.

"She'll come right enough, Judge. Right here to Langtry. To meet you." And he went on to name the exact time and date. Then he added, "But you won't be here. You'll be gone, beyond the jurisdiction of the great state of Texas." And he told the judge the hour and the day of his death.

The Devil leaned back in his chair. He chuckled evilly. "That's equitable, Judge. We'll see how the Lord handles you, you old reprobate."

And the twinkle in the judge's eyes died forevermore.

I was so lost in the drama that, when Joaquin stopped, my stomach lurched with the suddenness of it. My mind stumbled from that different time, that different Langtry into the hot, still afternoon reality of Joaquin's porch. The realization the tale was done slowly deepened.

The old man retired into his private reveries, his gaze deep among the stunted Mexican hills. For a time, I felt I was no longer present.

At last, he spoke, almost to himself. "You are a *Tejano,* señor; you should know the rest. Judge Bean worshiped Lily Langtry to the end of his days. He even built that pitiful opera house to try to entice her out here.

"And you know she finally did come, stopping the train a moment to meet the judge. But, he had already been called to his just rewards. All as the Devil promised him, so many years before.

"That is my story, señor. It is all true, every word of it." He turned those piercing eyes on me again. "Unless, of course, I made it all up."

I found myself afraid, not that the story was untrue, but that every word was absolutely true. And that the narrator knew far more than he had told. How much time had I promised him?

I suddenly wanted to get away from Joaquin Morales and his house with its adobe walls growing hotter in the golden light of the late afternoon sun slanting under the porch. He remained seated, watching my silhouette against the glare, as I gathered my equipment.

Yet, I couldn't resist a final comment in parting. Perhaps it was the folklorist in me, or the fool. "I'm surprised old Roy Bean didn't try to argue his case against Death. That might have proven even more interesting."

The sunlight sparkled in Joaquin's eyes. The wisp of a smile traveled across his weathered face. He sat quietly a moment, his gaze somewhere across the river, before he replied, "Death won that one on appeal." ✪

SWEET, SAVAGE SORCERER

by Esther M. Friesner

art: Paul Jaquays

"Druid's Blood," Lord Ruthven breathed. "Is that your ninth published fantasy or are you just happy to see me?"

"Stop!" Esther M. Friesner protested as he clasped her in his manly arms. "What of my husband, Walter, my two children, Michael and Anne, and my canonical author's cat back in Madison, Connecticut?"

Her struggles were in vain. Lord Ruthven laughed. "You might as well ask me, 'What of Elf Defense *and* Here Be Demons,*' your two other 1988 releases! You have a fondness for appearing between soft covers, I perceive."*

"Perhaps." She lifted her chin defiantly. "But, by my 1986 Romantic Times *award for Most Promising New Fantasy Writer, not with you!" And then, as only a Yale Ph.D. could do, she deleted him.*

Arrows whizzed past her as Narielle drummed slender heels into the heaving sides of her faithful unicorn, Thunderwind. Her bosom rose and fell in perfect cadence with the noble steed's movements as the Black Tower of Burning Doom thrust its massive structure into view. Behind her, the sun was setting in a fiery ball, quenching its flames slowly, achingly, in the moist depths of the Lesser Sea of Northern Alraziah-le-Fethynauri'in-ebu-Korfiamminettash.

Bitterly, Narielle reflected that if her father's men had not stopped to ask directions to the sea, they would never have been caught with their lances down by Lord Eyargh's mercenaries.

Another thick shaft, flying closer than the rest, cut off her meditations and the pointed tip of her left ear. The elfin princess lifted her chin defiantly and raised herself in the stirrups to turn and shout bold yet elegant insults at her pursuers. Then Thunderwind carried her over the threshold of the Black Tower and she was safe . . . for the moment.

Lord Eyargh's mercenaries, cheated of their prey, milled about under the lone window of the Black Tower of Burning Doom and made a collective nuisance of themselves. Narielle leaned out from the unglazed casement and regarded them with haughty disdain. They shot more arrows at her, one of which lodged in the headboard of the large, comfortable bed behind her. Her bold heart stifled the urge to scream her courageous head off. Instead, she seized the handy velvet bell rope on the wall and pulled with firm resolve.

A dark-robed shadow detached itself from the depths of the tower room, strode past the startled elfin princess, paused only to sweep her from her feet in powerfully muscled arms and pitch her onto the large, comfortable bed where she narrowly missed squashing a sleeping cat.

A word of unknown and ecstatic sorcery was spoken out the window. From below, the vile shouts of Lord Eyargh's mercenaries abruptly changed to the peeping of downy baby chicks. The figure at the window smiled with grim amusement. He paused only long enough to release a tethered chicken hawk before turning his attention to his still-rebounding guest.

"Yes?" he said.

"You are the sorcerer of the Black Tower?" Narielle's throat contracted with an emotion she would long deny as anything more than astonishment, dubiety, and the need for a cool drink.

"Does that surprise you?" His voice was low, thrilling, more powerful than any she had ever heard, twisting her ever-more rapidly palpitating heart into a tight knot of unnamable confusion. His azure eyes probed the very depths of her soul with a bold disregard for the empty charade of elfin High Court etiquette. But there was a deep strain of irony in his words, as if his past life contained some unknown secret wound of which no one save himself knew, and whose carefully concealed pain had, if not poisoned, at

least tainted the life of one outwardly so strong and unassailable.

"No," she lied. She got off the bed fast.

He laughed; once, shortly. But in that single syllable of supposed merriment, Narielle read many unspoken sorrows. She could not lie to him. He had suffered enough.

"That is . . . I mean . . . you're so young."

Now his eyes, bluer than the magic sword Narielle concealed beneath her voluminous green velvet skirts sewn with pearls and trimmed with gold lace, narrowed. "I am," he replied. It was a challenge.

The elfin princess was not one to let any man ramp all over her. Hers was a proud spirit. She lifted her chin defiantly and took command of the conversation. "The name of Brandon of the Black Tower has reached my father, Lord Vertig of the Silver Unicorn, king of the elves of the Green Woodlands. Even as we speak, he is besieged in the White Castle of the Golden Arches by his mortal enemy, Lord Eyargh of the Red Sword. By a ruse, I and one hundred fifty of my father's men managed to slip through the enemy lines, dispatched in search of you, hoping to enlist the already legendary aid of your sorcerous powers in our cause."

"I know," he said.

"Do you?" She could not conceal her astonishment.

"I *am* a sorcerer. Perhaps you have heard of crystal balls?" His finely formed yet generous mouth contorted itself into an expression at once fascinating and unreadable. His hand strayed upward to touch her injured extremity. "You've been wounded." A strange catch wrenched all sarcasm from his voice.

Startled as much by the unexpected concern in the young wizard's words as by the almost electrical shock that coursed through her every fiber at this lightest contact of his flesh to her flesh, Narielle replied, "It's nothing."

"Nothing?" Behind his simple repetition of her very word, she thought she detected a new sense of respect for herself as a person in her own right.

His breath burned hot and fierce across the nape of her neck as he murmured a healing spell over her ear. Confusion fluttered in her breast like a caged gryphon. She stepped away from him, saying, "While you waste your magic on what is no more than a scratch, elves perish!"

As she spoke of her people's distress, she could not forbid her eyes from straying the length of the young enchanter's person. Dark, unruly hair fell in a shock of thick, black waves just above his cerulean eyes. When he smiled, the perfect whiteness of his teeth showed in even more startling contrast to his sunbronzed skin. His nose hinted at past hurts borne with nobility and forbearance. The neck of his necromancer's robe was open, revealing the smooth, enticing expanse of his broad chest. The thin material could not effectively conceal the incredible size, the almost terrifying bulk, the barely restrained thrust and untamed, overwhelming power of his shoulders.

Fortunately, there was a full-length mirror on the wall opposite Narielle,

which allowed her the leisure to contemplate her own fiery red hair, emerald green eyes, and lithe, slender, graceful yet self-assured form.

Brandon of the Black Tower chuckled deep in his throat. How did he dare to mock her? She hated him! She would always hate him! Then he spoke: "Such fire. And what will you give me in exchange for my help . . . my lady?" There was no mistaking the scorn in his voice. She hated him still more wildly, yet more passionately! "Gold?" She couldn't stand him!

Narielle's reply was as cold and formal as wounded pride and the narrowly repressed desire to slap the sorcerer's grinning face could make it: "No."

"No?" His craggy eyebrows rose.

"On my honor as a highborn elfin princess and virgin. My father's men carried the gold for your fee. When Lord Eyargh's men attacked my father's men, the chest fell over a cliff into the sea, and the men of the Vegas Sands made off with it."

"So you have no chest." Now he no longer smiled. "You speak much of men, my lady . . . for one who calls herself a virgin."

She would kick him in the shins and tell her noble father on him! "Do you doubt the evidence of your eyes, my lord Brandon? I rode into your tower on a unicorn."

"It is well known by the lowest village idiot that elfin women can fake their unicorns." The ancient pain rose ever nearer to the surface of the young sorcerer's emotions and threatened to pierce through. In that instant, with a lurch of her own heart, Narielle understood the long-past but never forgotten betrayal that had embittered Brandon's proud soul. Who had she been, that other elf-maiden who had so cruelly deceived him? Why had she done it? What wouldn't Narielle give to get her hands on the little point-eared bitch and teach her some manners?

Compassion for Brandon welled up in Narielle's bosom, inflating it nicely. It was only her own fierce, overweening, foolish pride that prevented her from taking him into her arms at once and soothing away all his past hurts as if he were no more than a little boy, or a wrongfully whipped puppy. Yet even as she snapped harsh words at him, her heart swelled with the dreadful ache of longing to cuddle him.

"Then perhaps you had better hire a consulting village idiot!" She tossed her glorious mane of hair, her nostrils flaring, and pawed the ground with grand bravado. "Even he would be able to tell you that the virtue of the ladies of the royal house of Lord Vertig of the Silver Unicorn of the White Castle of the Golden Arches of the Green Woodlands is one that we protect with steel!" So saying, she drew the full, awe-inspiring length of the impossibly hard enchanted blade from the clinging embrace of the soft scabbard beneath her skirts. With a wild, untrammeled exultation to feel her hand close around the imposing diameter of that wondrous hilt once more, Narielle realized just how deeply she loved her sword.

Brandon looked mildly amused. He made a gesture whose mystic significance was known to few wizards. Narielle watched with mounting horror as her blade shuddered, then drooped like sunstruck celery. The enchanter took it from her nerveless hand and flung it across the room where it bounced off the large, comfortable bed and scared the cat.

"You have no gold, yet you would have my services," he said. "Very well, you shall have them. And in exchange, I shall have —"

"What?" The elfin princess' bosom lifted defiantly.

"— you."

With a hoarse ejaculation he crushed her to his chest. She felt his wizardhood pressing against her thigh and could not tell whether the emotions also now rising within her were so much fear as hesitantly joyous anticipation of what was to come. Roughly, he tore aside her golden lace, stripping the lush green velvet from her heaving shoulders in one masterful motion. Pearls popped and caromed off everything in sight. The cat yelped and leaped off the large, comfortable bed.

After he returned from burying the unicorn, he knelt like the meanest supplicant beside the pile of new-mown hay which had housed so much recent passion. "Can you ever forgive me . . . Narielle?"

Her eyes brimmed with the ebbing tide of complete fulfillment and a tender fondness for the repentant sorcerer. "Forgive you, Brandon? For making a *real* elf of me? Oh, you are more magician than any of those wand-waving charlatans!" Playfully, he plucked fragrant straws from her tousled hair and threw them at the cat who was back on the large, comfortable, conventional, unromantic, deliberately overlooked bed.

"Forgive me for doubting you, my love. And about the unicorn —"

She laughed the rich, full-throated laugh of newly, sweetly acquired wisdom. "Thunderwind was a loyal beast, but in his heart he understood that this day would come. I think he was glad it came quickly and painlessly."

But Brandon was not assuaged. Unaccustomed anguish filled his sapphire eyes. With a harsh sob he buried his face between the soft, welcoming curves of her two hands and implored her pardon for ever having doubted her. "It is you who are the enchanter, Narielle!" he gasped. "You have taken a blind, headstrong fool and made a man of him!"

"Did I? Good. Now, about Daddy . . ."

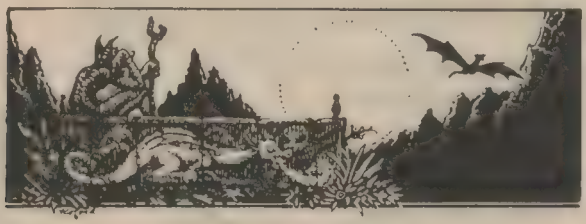
Brandon of the Black Tower raised his large yet sensitive hands to a sky no less blue than his eyes and turned Lord Vertig's foes into frogs. The siege was lifted, although the transformed Lord Eyargh hung around the moat defiantly. He was finally routed when Lord Vertig dispatched a contingent of net-wielding victualers to scoop up those of the enemy they could catch. That night there was great feasting and rejoicing in the White Castle of the Golden Arches.

Laughing, Narielle attempted to force another deep-fried nugget between her beloved's lips.

"What *is* that?" he asked, returning her joyous laughter a hundredfold.

"Batrachian bits," she replied, smearing sweet-and-sour nectar down the front of his chest on purpose for future reference. "Try them; they're delicious."

"Not half so delicious as you," he murmured, and as the undeniable surge of their mutual attraction and respect mounted inexorably, he dragged her beneath the banqueting table and they missed dessert.



SF CLICHÉS V: THE ALIEN

It's monitored our TV shows for years.
It lands by night, and only talks to kooks.
It does not understand these things called "tears."
It only wants to warn us about nukes.
It's proof against our guns and tanks and planes.
It needs our land or water, food or air.
It wants to suck the knowledge from our brains.
It doesn't think we're sapient, or care.
It's wiser than a herd of ancient Greeks.
It hides Its claw inside a fleshtone glove.
It messes up Its pronouns when It speaks.
It lusts and slobbers on the girl you love.
Now turn the mirror face against the wall
And swear you never saw It there at all.

— John M. Ford

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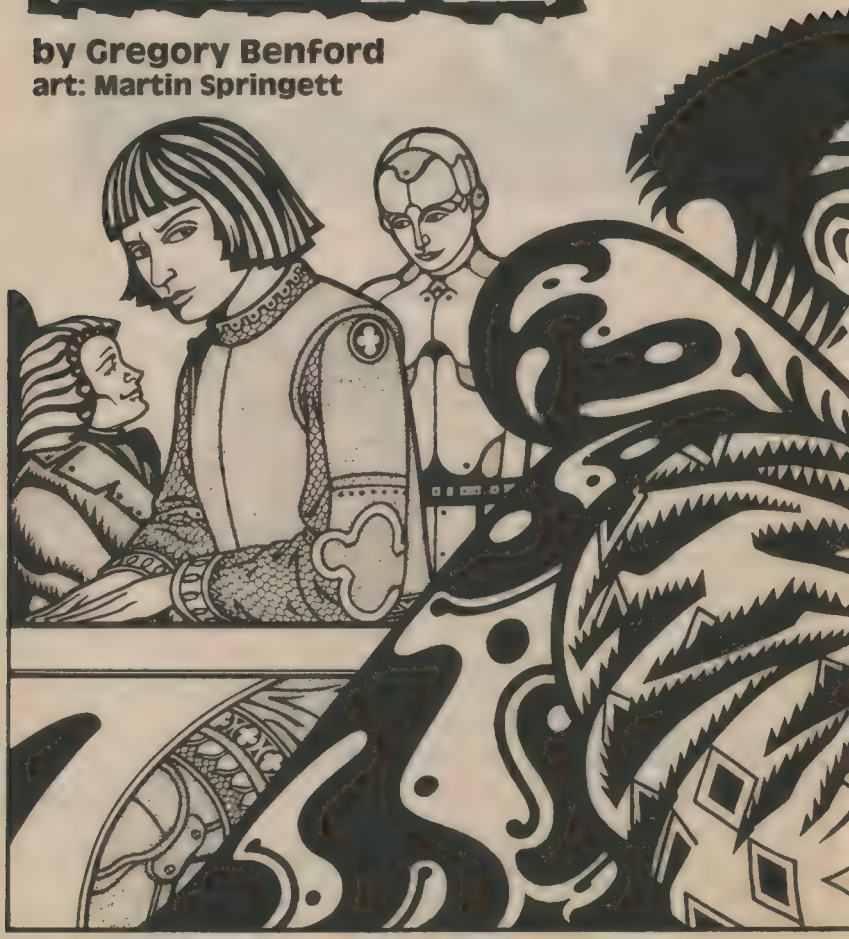
THE ROSE & THE SCALPEL

by Gregory Benford
art: Martin Springett



Joan of Arc wakened inside an amber dream to find herself sitting outdoors at a round table in an unsettling white chair. Its seat, unlike those in her home village of Domremy, was not hand-hewn of wood. Its smooth slickness lewdly aped her contours. She reddened.

Strangers, mostly in groups of two and three, surrounded her. She could not tell woman from man except for those whose pantaloons and tunics outlined their intimate parts even more than anything she'd seen in Chinon at the court of the Great and True King. The strangers seemed oblivious of her, though she could hear them chattering in the background as distinctly as she sometimes heard her voices. She listened only long enough to conclude that what they had to say, having nothing to do with God or France, was clearly not worth hearing.

Outside, an iron river of self-moving carriages muttered by. Mists concealed distant ivory spires like melting churches. What *was* this place?

A vision, perhaps related to her beloved voices. Could such apparitions be holy?

Surely the man at a nearby table was no angel. He was eating scrambled eggs — through a straw.

And the women — unchaste, flagrant, gaudy cornucopias of hip and thigh and breast. Some drank red wine from transparent goblets, different from any she'd seen at the royal court. Others seemed to sup from floating clouds, billowing *mousse* fogs. One mist — beef with a tangy Loire sauce — passed near her. She breathed in, but she could smell nothing.

Was this heaven? Where appetites were satisfied without labor and toil?

But no. Surely the final reward was not so, so . . . carnal. And perturbing. And embarrassing.

The fire some sucked into their mouths from little reeds alarmed her. A cloud of smoke drifting her way flushed birds of panic from her breast, although she could not smell the smoke, nor did it burn her eyes or sear her throat. *The fire, the fire,* she thought, and when she saw the being made of breastplate coming at her with a tray of food and drink — poison from enemies, the foes of France! — she at once reached for her sword.

"Be with you in a moment," the breastplated thing said as it wheeled past her to another table. "I've only got four hands."

An inn, she thought. It was some kind of inn, though there appeared to be nowhere to lodge. And yes, she was supposed to meet someone, a gentleman. That one, the tall skinny old man — much older than Jacques Dars, her father — the only one besides herself attired unlike the others. His dress recalled the foppish dandies at the Great and True King's court. His hair was curled, its whiteness set off by a lilac ribbon at this throat. He wore a pair of mignonette ruffles with narrow edging, a long waistcoat of brown satin with colored flowers, red velvet breeches, white stockings, and chamois shoes. A silly, vain aristocrat, she thought. A fop accustomed to carriages, who could not so much as sit a horse.

But duty was a sacred obligation, and if her master, Charles, ordered her to advance, advance she would.

She rose. The suit of mail provided by the king to help her carry out the divine bidding of her voices felt surprisingly light. She hardly sensed the belted-on protective leather flaps in front and back, nor the two metal arm plates that left elbows free to wield the sword. No one paid the least attention to the rustle of her mail or her faint clank.

"Are you the gentleman I am to meet? Monsieur Arouet?"

"Don't call me that," he snapped. "Arouet is my father's name — the name of an authoritarian prude, not mine. No one has called me that in years."

Up close, he seemed less ancient than she'd thought. She'd been misled by his white hair, which she now saw was false, a powdered wig secured by the lilac ribbon under his chin.

"What should I call you then?" she asked. She suppressed terms of contempt learned from comrades-in-arms, now borne by demons to her tongue's edge but not beyond.

"Poet, tragedian, historian." He leaned forward and with a wicked wink whispered, "I style myself Voltaire. Freethinker. Philosopher king."

"Besides the King of Heaven and His son, I call but one man king. Charles VII of the House of Valois. And I'll call you Arouet until my royal master tells me to do otherwise."

"My dear *pucelle,* your Charles has been dead for two hundred years." He glanced at the noiseless carriages propelled by invisible forces on the street and added, "Perhaps more. As for the present monarch, spare me any praise of him. His bugger of a regent exiled me from town for making public — in the most exquisite Latin verse if I say so myself — that his daughter, whom he regularly scoured, is no better than a whore. As you well know, in France it's dangerous to speak the truth. You'd better have one foot in the stirrup if you do. Sit down, sit down. And help me get that droll waiter's attention. I'm Locke's *tabula rasa* when it comes to gaining the attention of what appears to be some kind of menial machine."

"You know me then," she said. She too, led by her voices, had cast off her father's name to call herself *La Pucelle,* The Chaste Maid.

"I know you very well. Besides my garments — beautiful, *n'est-çe pas?* — you're the only familiar thing about this place. You and the street, though I must say you're younger than I thought while the street . . . hmmm . . . seems both wider yet older. They finally got round to paving it." He pointed to a sign that bore the inn's name — AUX DEUX MAGOTS — adding, "Mlle. Lecouvreur, a famous actress — but of course you know nothing of that — used to live on this very spot. I resided with her rent-free till the day she died in my arms."

"It must be hard to lose one's wife."

"From what I have observed, nothing is easier. She was my mistress, not

my wife. Losing a mistress is an altogether different thing. One must seek new lodgings, always a nuisance, and what's more, one must pay for them until another mistress comes along. You're blushing — how sweet."

"I know *noth*ing of such things." She added with more than a trace of pride, "I am a maid."

"So you and your disciples never tire of reminding us, though why one would be proud of such an unnatural state, I for one can't imagine. *J'aime le luxe, et même la mollesse.* 'I love luxury, even overindulgence.' Forgive me if I quote myself, I can't help it. I have such impeccable taste."

"A pity it is not reflected in your dress."

"My tailors will be mortally offended! But allow me to suggest that it is you, my dear *pucelle,* who, in your insistence on dressing like a man, would deprive civilized society of one of its most harmless pleasures."

"An insistence I most dearly paid for," she retorted, remembering how the bishops badgered her about her preference for male attire as relentlessly as they inquired after her divine voices. As if in the absurd attire members of her sex were required to wear she could have defeated the English at Orléans, or led three thousand knights to victory at Jargeau and Meung-sur-Loire, Beaugency and Patay, throughout that summer of glorious victories when, led by her voices, she could do no wrong. Then the blood-red darkness of lost battles descended, muffling and confusing her voices, while those of her English-loving enemies grew strong.

"No need to get testy," Monsieur Arouet said, gently patting her knee plate. "Although I personally find your attire repulsive, I would defend to the death your right to dress or undress any way you please." He eyed the near-transparent upper garment of a female inn patron nearby. "Paris has not lost its appetite for finery after all. Fruit from the gods, don't you agree?"

"No, I do *not.* There is no virtue greater than chastity in women or in men. Our lord was chaste, as are our saints and priests."

"Priests chaste! Pity you weren't at the school my father forced me to attend as a boy. You could have so informed the Jesuits who daily buggered their innocent charges. And what of him?" he asked, referring to the four-handed creature on wheels rolling toward them. "No doubt such a creature is chaste. Is it then virtuous too? If chastity were practiced in France as much as it's preached, the race would be extinct."

The wheeled creature braked by their table. Stamped on his chest was what appeared to be his name: GARÇON 213-ADM. In a bass voice as clear as any man's, he said, "A costume party, eh? I hope my delay will not make you late. Two of our mechfolk are having some worn-out parts replaced, and one short-order cook's out with a cold."

It eyed the other cook, a honey-haired blonde in a hairnet, whose humanness stood out among the mechanical menials employed in the inn. The Maid frowned. Its glance recalled the way her jailers had eyed her before she

cast aside the women's garments her inquisitors forced her to wear. Resuming manly attire, she'd scornfully put her jailers in their place. The cook assumed a haughty look, but fussed with her hairnet and smiled at Garçon 213-ADM before averting her eyes.

Monsieur Arouet reached out and touched the mechman's nearest arm, whose construction the Maid could not help but admire. If such a creature could be made to sit a horse, in battle it would be invincible. The possibilities —

"Where are we?" Monsieur Arouet asked. "Or perhaps I should ask, when? I have friends in high places —"

"And I in low," the mechman said good-naturedly.

"— and I demand a full account of where we are, what's going on."

The mechman made a don't-ask-me gesture with two of his free arms while the two others set the table. "How could a mechwait with intelligence programmed to suit his station instruct Monsieur, a human being, in the veiled mysteries of simspace? Have Monsieur and Mademoiselle decided on their order?"

"You have not yet brought us the menu," said Monsieur Arouet.

The mechman pushed a button under the table. Two flat scrolls embedded in the table appeared before the Maid and Monsieur Arouet. The letters on them glowed. The Maid let out a small cry of delight — then, in response to Monsieur Arouet's censorious look, clapped her hand over her mouth. Her peasant manners were a frequent source of embarrassment.

"Ingenious," said Monsieur Arouet, switching the button on and off as he examined the underside of the table. "How does it work?"

"I'm not programmed to know. You'll have to ask a mechlectrician about that."

"A what?"

"With all due respect, Monsieur, my other customers are waiting. I *am* programmed to take your order."

"What will you have, my dear?" Monsieur Arouet asked her.

She looked down, embarrassed. "Order for me," she said.

"Ah, yes. I quite forgot."

"Forgot what?" asked the mechman.

"My companion is unlettered. She can't read. I might as well be too for all the good this menu's doing me."

The mechman explained which items were suited to great or small hunger, which to great or small thirst.

"*Cloud*-food? Electronic cuisine?" Monsieur Arouet made a face. "Just bring me the best you have for great hunger and thirst. What can you recommend for abstinent virgins — a plate of dirt perhaps? Chased with a glass of vinegar?"

"Bring me a slice of bread," the Maid said in a tone of frosty dignity. "And a small bowl of wine to dip it in."

"Wine!" said Monsieur Arouet. "Your voices allow wine? *Mais quel scandale!* If word got out that you drink wine, what would the priests say of the shoddy example you're setting for the future saints of France?" He turned to the mechman. "Bring her a glass of water, small." As Garçon 213-ADM withdrew, Monsieur Arouet called out, "And make sure the bread is a crust! Preferably moldy!"

Tech Hilliard strode into his office in the Silicon Valley, his long-time colleague and friend Maquina beside him. Despite his country's slow twenty-first-century decline, the Valley, by 2130, had become the artificial intelligence design capital of the world, and Artifice Inc., the company he'd served for fifteen years, was its most prestigious firm. It had displaced Eurofac and the Asian Alliances in the sale and design of hologram intelligences. The two major political parties of France, Eurofac's leading member nation, had hired Artifice Inc. to recreate two of her national heroes as accurately as possible.

"It makes me nervous," Maquina said as she sat down by Tech at his control board. "Just think! France's future — maybe the future of artificial intelligences on the planet — will be decided by what you and I call up on that screen."

"Would you want anyone else to do it?" Tech asked, keenly aware of the fleeting warmth of her thigh as it accidentally brushed his.

He'd spent the morning "eavesdropping" on Voltaire and the Maid. Everything had gone well, and he was feeling even more self-confident than usual. "We're perfect for the job. Wizards — and before this is over, everyone on the planet's going to know it."

Maquina's breasts swelled as she drew in her breath, held it, then slowly let it out. "I just hope my client doesn't find out about yours. The company's taking an awful chance, not telling either one of them about the other."

"So what?"

"So they're deadly rivals, that's what! If they find out that the same company is handling both accounts, they'll take their business elsewhere. To a Eurofac firm!"

"No way. Not if they want to win. Why do you think they came to us in the first place? We've got the Eurofac outfits outclassed."

"Oh, yeah? You're forgetting the Asians. What about Yamamoto? What if they take their business there?"

"The company, for once, made the right decision. The only way to assure a fair fight is to get the best there is for both sides." Tech gave her his cocky, winning smile. "You and me. Just wait till you get a load of *this*."

He switched off the light, booted up, and leaned back in his swivel chair, legs stretched out on the table before him. He wanted to impress her. That wasn't all he wanted, but since her husband had been crushed, beyond repair by even the best medicos, he'd decided to wait a decent interval before

he made his move. What a team they would make! Open Maquinatech and make the three-piece suits at Artifice Inc. tremble.

Down, down, down — into the replicated world. Its seamless blue complexity swelled across the entire facing wall. Vibrotactile feedback from inductance dermotabs perfected the illusion.

They swooped into the Paris of 2130. Streets whirled, buildings turned in artful projection. Even the crowds and clumped traffic below seemed authentic. Then they careened into their foreground sim: a well-known café on the Ave. St. Germain. Cloying smells, the muted grind of traffic outside, a rattle of plates, the heady aroma of soufflé.

Tech zoomed them into the same time frame as the recreated entities. A lean man loomed across the wall. His eyes radiated intelligence; his mouth tilted with sardonic mirth.

Maquina whistled through her teeth. With narrowed eyes she watched the re-creation's mouth, as if to read its lips. Voltaire was interrogating the mechwaiter. "Some resolution," she said, appropriately awed. "I can't get mine that clear. I still don't know how you do it."

"I'll show you. If you'll tell me how you got your vocal inflections to sound so real."

She rolled her dark eyes and shook her head. A few strands of her long hair clung briefly to his sleeve. "I should have known with you there'd be nothing for nothing."

A double-entendre? Tech wondered. Muted seductiveness? He could be sure of nothing but the sultriness of her voice.

"Besides," she continued. "I already told you. You just weren't listening."

He gave her a skeptical look, though he knew it was true. Her sensuality distracted him.

"Hey," she said. "Hey. What are you doing?" He grinned with glee when her mouth fell open at his audacity. "You're not —!"

Alarm skewed her mouth, but he could tell she was intrigued. "Want me to take her off?"

She stared at the image of her Joan next to his Voltaire. She turned to him with an expression of admiration mingled with fear. "We're not supposed to bring them on together till the day they meet in the Coliseum. It's in our contract with the company! Hastings will skewer us if he finds out."

"Want me to take her off?" he asked again.

"Of course not. Activate the sensors. I have some questions for them of my own. I'd like to hear firsthand what the Rose and the Scalpel have to say."

"Not yet. I've got a little proposition for you."

"Uh-oh." Her brow arched. "Forbidden, no doubt."

He waited, just to tantalize her. And to judge, from her reaction, how receptive she'd be if he tried to change the nature of their long-standing Platonic relationship. He *had* tried, once before. Her rejection — she was

married, she gently reminded him — only made him desire her more. All that and faithful in marriage, too.

Her body language now — a slight pulling away — told him she was still mourning her dead husband. He was prepared to wait the customary year, but only if he had to.

"What say we download both of them with everything mankind's learned since they died," he said.

"Impossible."

"No, just expensive. But we have the budget."

"So much!"

"So what? Just think about it. A duel between faith and reason based on fifteenth- and eighteenth-century info is one thing. But one using everything we know today — natural selection, psychophilosophy, mindtech, gene destinies —"

"Monsieur Bondieu will never go for it," Maquina said. "He represents France's radical right, remember?"

"Your Rose stands to gain more than my Scalpel since she died first. Two centuries of additional info my baby already has."

"But it's precisely modern information the Preservers of Our Father's Faith don't want. They want the historical Maid, pure and uncontaminated by modern ideas. I'd have to program her to read —"

"A cinch."

"— write, handle higher mathematics. Give me a break!"

"Do you object on ethical grounds? Or simply to avoid a few measly centuries of work?"

"Easy for *you* to say. Your re-creation has an essentially modern mind. All you had to do was feed him his own work and dozens of biographies. The Maid is as much myth as she is fact. I had to recreate her out of practically thin air."

"Then your objection's based on laziness, not principle."

"It's based on both."

"Will you at least give it some thought?"

"I just did. The answer is no."

"Okay, okay," Tech said. No use arguing with her once she had made up her mind. If women were as easy to reprogram as mechmaids . . . If mechmaids could be made to feel like flesh and bone . . . "Stand by. I'll activate the sensors."

Her mood swung from resistance to excitement; in her enthusiasm, she even touched his leg. His re-creation, not surprisingly, was the first one to speak.

"What's going on here?" Voltaire rose, hands on his hips, and peered down at them from the screen. "Who are you? Whom do you represent? How dare you trifle with us in this unenlightened way!"

Tech turned to Maquina and said, "Do you want to explain it to him or

should I?"

"He's your re-creation, not mine."

Tech had already fashioned an experience-program that could do the job. He dipped the Voltaire-sim into a colorless void of sensory static and then cut in the time acceleration.

Sim-personalities needed time to assimilate information, but the advantage of digital constructs was their immense speed. He thrust Voltaire into a cluttered, seemingly real experience-net. The personality reacted to the simulation and raced through the induced emotions. Voltaire was rational; his personality could accept new ideas that took the Joan-sim far longer.

What did it do to a reconstruction of a real person, when knowledge of a different reality dawned? This was the most difficult moment of the reanimation. Shock waves would resound through the digital personalities, forcing emotional adjustments. Could they take it? He and Maquina could step in only after the automatic programs had done their best.

Here their math-craft met its test. Artificial personalities had to survive this cusp point or crash into insanity and incoherence. Racing along highways of expanding perception, the ontological swerves could jolt the construct so hard that it shattered. Or cause a wreck.

The moment came. Tech sucked Voltaire and Joan back into real time.

Within a minute he knew that Voltaire was still intact, functional, integrated. And irked. The hologram scowled, swore, and loudly demanded the right to initiate communication whenever he liked.

"You think I want to be at *your* mercy whenever I've something to say? You're talking to a man who was exiled, censored, jailed, suppressed — who lived in constant fear of church and state authorities —"

"Fire," the Maid whispered in an eerie voice.

"Calm down," Tech ordered, "or I'll shut you off." He froze action and turned to Maquina. "What do you think? Should we comply?"

"Why not?" she said. "It's not fair for them to be forever at our beck and call."

"Hmmm. Fair? This is a *sim*!"

"Well, still . . ."

"The next question is how."

"I don't care how you do it," the hologram said. "Just do it — at once!"

"Hold your horses," Tech said. "We'll let you have running time, to integrate your perception space."

"What does *that* mean?" the hologram-man asked. "Artful expression is one thing, jargon another."

"Work out your kinks," Tech replied dryly.

"So that we can converse?"

"Yes," Maquina said. "At your initiation, not just ours. Don't go for a walk, though — that requires too much data-shuffling."

"We're trying to hold costs down here," Tech said, leaning back so he

could get a better view of Maquina's legs.

"Well, hurry up," the image said. "Patience is for martyrs and saints, not for men of *belles lettres.*"

Tech pointed to a light on his control board. "We'll know you're trying to get through if this light flashes red."

"Must it be red?" the Maid inquired. "Can you not make it blue? Blue is so cool, the color of the sea. Water is stronger than fire. It can put fire out."

"Stop babbling nonsense," the other hologram snapped. He beckoned to the mechwaiter and said, "Tell those idiots to put their cigarettes out at once. They're upsetting the Maid. And you two geniuses out there, if you can resurrect the dead, you certainly should be able to change a red light into blue."

"I don't believe this guy," said Maquina. "Who does he think he is?"

"The voice of reason," Tech replied. "François-Marie Arouet de Voltaire. Who else?"

She tried to ignore the sorceress called Maquina, who claimed to be her creator, as if anyone but the King of Heaven could lay claim to such a feat. She didn't feel like talking to anyone. Events crowded in — too rushed, too dense. Her choking, pain-shot death still swarmed about her.

On the dunce's cap they'd set upon her shaven head on that fiery day, the darkest and yet brightest day of her short life, her "crimes" were inscribed in the holy tongue: *Heretica, Relapsa, Apostata, Idolater.* The learned cardinals and bishops of the English-loving University of Paris and the Church, Christ's bride on earth, had set her live body on fire. All for carrying out God's will — that the Great and True King should be His minister in France. For that, they'd rejected the king's ransom and sent her to the searing pyre. What then might they not do to this sorceress called Maquina — who, like her, dwelt among men, wore men's attire, and claimed for herself powers that eclipsed those of the Creator Himself?

"Please go away," she murmured. "I must have silence if I am to hear my voices."

But neither La Sorcière nor the bearded man in black — he resembled the patriarchs on the domed ceiling of the great church at Rouen — would leave her alone.

"Sacred Maid, Rose of France," said the bearded one, who called himself Bondieu and claimed to represent her spiritual descendants in France, "I beg you, hear me out. Our cause is just. The fate of our beloved France depends upon our winning to our side as many converts as we can. If France is to be a nation of believers who uphold the sacred, time-honored traditions of the past, we must defeat the Alliance of Secular Skeptics for Scientific Truth. Unless we do, France shall become a nation of freethinking atheists with no respect for anything but secular godlessness."

She tried to turn away, but the weight of her chains stopped her. "Leave

me alone. Although I killed no one, I fought in many battles to assure the victory of France's Great and True King. I presided over his coronation at Rheims. I was wounded in battle for his sake and the sake of France." She held up her wrists, for she was now in the foul cell at Rouen, in leg-irons and chains. "The world knows how I was requited for my pains. I shall wage war no more."

Monsieur Bondieu turned to the sorceress and said, "It is a sacrilege to keep a saint in chains. Can't you transport her to some other place? A cathedral? A church?

"There aren't any near here," La Sorcière said. "Only corporate offices, restaurants, and hotels."

Monsieur Bondieu clucked and muttered something in French under his breath. "While I must say I am impressed with what you've done, unless you can make her cooperate, what good is she to us?"

"I haven't got all the bugs out," La Sorcière said. "It was either her cell or a Paris café. I thought it would be more — uh — fitting to introduce you to her here."

"Can you not make her smaller? It's impossible to talk to a giant."

The Maid, to her astonishment, shrunk from three meters in height to less than one.

Monsieur Bondieu seemed pleased. "You misunderstand the nature of the war that lies ahead. Seven centuries have passed since your ascension into heaven. Wars between nations have been outlawed for a hundred years. But political differences still persist."

The Maid sat up at this and said, "Tell me one thing. Is the King of France a descendant of the English Henry's House of Lancaster? Or is he a Valois, descended from the Great and True King Charles?"

Monsieur Bondieu did not answer at once. "I think it may be truly said that the Preservers of Our Father's Faith, the party that I represent, are in a manner of speaking descendants of Charles."

The Maid smiled. She *knew* her voices had been heaven-sent, no matter what the bishops said. She'd only denied them when they took her to the cemetery of St. Ouen, and only for fear of the fire. She'd been right to recant her recantation two days later; the Lancastrian failure to annex France confirmed that. If Monsieur Bondieu spoke for descendants of the French House of Valois, despite his absence of a noble title, she would hear him out.

"Proceed," she said.

Monsieur Bondieu explained that France was soon to hold a national election between its two major parties, the Preservers and the Skeptics. Each party controlled half of France. To make the nation governable, one party had to win a clear majority. Both parties had agreed to hold a Great Debate between any two verbal duelists, to decide the question whose answer would settle the election's major issue.

"What question," the Maid asked, "is that?"

"Whether mechanical beings endowed with artificial intelligence, who constitute one quarter of our population, should be allowed full citizenship, with all its attendant rights."

The Maid shrugged. "Only aristocrats and noblemen have rights."

"Not anymore. The common people have had rights for going on four hundred years."

"Peasants like me?" the Maid asked. "We have rights?"

Monsieur Bondieu, exasperated, turned to La Sorcière. "Didn't you even tell her about the French Revolution? Must I do everything?"

"You wanted her as is," La Sorcière said. "Or, rather, as was."

Monsieur Bondieu spent two minutes ranting about something he called the French Revolution. Then he explained that advances in what he called technology had made the re-creation of deceased national heroes possible, via simulations. The Preservers, whom he was honored to represent, had chosen her, The Maid and Sacred Rose of France, to represent their side. He did not know who would represent the opposition, nor did he care. "God's on our side," he announced, making the sign of the cross. "The Preservers shall prevail."

"Why don't you ask your king? One of his counselors? Or one of your learned men?"

Monsieur Bondieu made a dismissive gesture. "Our leaders are too pallid. Intensity and passion are regarded as bad form. They're out of style."

The Great Debate between faith and reason would be held in the National Coliseum, now completing construction, before an audience of 400,000 souls. The Maid and her opponent would appear in a hologram a hundred fifty meters high to debate the one question whose answer would settle the fate of artificially intelligent beings, not just in France, but possibly on the entire planet.

"Planet?" the Maid inquired. "What's a planet?"

"You wanted her uncorrupted by modern ideas," La Sorcière said. "You got her."

After a brief digression on Copernicus, Monsieur Bondieu informed her that every household in France was by law equipped with a life-sized screen, on which the faith vs. reason debate would be viewed. Each citizen would then vote on the question, yes or no. Not to vote was punishable by imprisonment and a fine.

The Maid listened in silence, forced to absorb seven centuries of change in seven minutes. When Monsieur Bondieu finished, she said, "I excelled in battle, if only for a brief time, but never in argument. No doubt Monsieur Bondieu knows of my fate."

Monsieur Bondieu looked pained. "Your reputation was restored at hearings held twenty-six years after your death. Those involved in your condemnation repented of their mistake. Before the rise to influence of the Skeptics, no one was held in higher esteem by all France than you, *La Rose de la*

Loire."

"Hardly the point. Had I been skilled in argument, I'd have managed to convince my inquisitors, the English-loving theologians of the University of Paris, that I am not a witch."

"But *God* was on your side."

The Maid laughed. "God's on the side of His son and the saints and martyrs, too. But that does not mean they escape failure and death."

"She's right," La Sorcière said. "Even worlds and galaxies share man's fate."

"France *needs* you," Monsieur Bondieu pleaded. "We ourselves have become too much like our machines. We hold nothing sacred except the smooth functioning of our parts. We know you will address the question with intensity, yet in simplicity and truth. That's all we ask. The rest we leave to God's will and to fate."

The Maid felt fatigued. She needed solitude, time to reflect. "I must have time to consult with my voices," she told them. She paused. "Will there be only one or many questions that I must address?"

"Just one."

The inquisitors had been far more demanding. They asked many questions, dozens, sometimes the same ones, over and over again. Right answers at Poitiers proved wrong elsewhere. Deprived of food, drink, and rest, intimidated by the enforced journey to the cemetery, exhausted by the tedious sermon they compelled her to hear and wracked by terror of the fire, she could not withstand their interrogation. "Does the Archangel Michael have long hair?" "Is St. Margaret stout or lean?" "Are St. Catherine's eyes brown or blue?" They trapped her into assigning to voices of the spirit, attributions of the flesh. Then they perversely condemned her for confounding sacred spirit with corrupt flesh. She could not therefore be certain if this Bondieu would turn out to be friend or foe.

"What is it?" she wanted to know. "This single question you want me to answer."

"There is universal consensus that man-made intelligences have a kind of brain. The question we want you to answer is whether they have a soul."

"Only Almighty God has the power to create a soul."

Monsieur Bondieu smiled. "We Preservers couldn't agree with you more. Artificial intelligences, unlike us, their creators, have no soul. They're just machines. Mechanical contrivances with electronically programmed brains. Only man has a soul."

"If you already know the answer to the question, why do you need me?"

"To persuade France," Monsieur Bondieu replied. "France, the planet, and the space-colonist worlds."

The Maid reflected. Her inquisitors had known the answers to the questions they plied her with, too. Monsieur Bondieu seemed sincere, but then so were the learned University of Paris men who pronounced her a witch be-

cause she didn't have what they considered the right answers, and because they loved the English more than their own king. Yet Monsieur Bondieu had told her the answer beforehand, one with which any sensible person would agree. Still, she could not be sure of his intentions. Not even the crucifix she asked the priest to hold aloft was proof against the oily smoke, the biting flames. . . .

"Well?" asked Monsieur Bondieu. "Will the Sacred Rose of France consent to be our champion?"

"These planet people and the space-colonist worlds," she said, "are they too descendants of Charles, the Great and True King, of the House of Valois?"

Tech strode into the Satellite to meet his drinkdrug buddy and coworker Nim. He arrived early, probably due to guilt at having neglected their friendship since the Great Debate project began. He was surprised to find Nim already there. To judge from his dilated pupils, he'd been there most of the afternoon.

They exchanged warm greetings, after which Tech said, "All right, what's all the space-spy stuff? Did you just make it up because I've been neglecting you, not to mention my thirst? Or is there something going on that I should know?"

Nim shook his head and said, "Same old Tech. Blunt as a bull. Aren't you even going to order first? I recommend the Swirlsnort. It won't do a thing for your thirst — in fact, it will dry up your entire head — but you won't care."

"You know me," Tech said. "I'll try anything once."

The mechmaid brought the Swirlsnort, a strange powdery concoction that tasted like nutmeg. Tech sniffed it slowly, one nostril at a time. Because he was habitually engrossed in his work, he relied on Nim to inform him of any office politics that might affect his projects and his funding. He wanted to be relatively clear-headed when Nim filled him in. After that, he'd allow himself to get skyed.

"You may not like what I have to say," said Nim. "It concerns Maquina."

"Maquina!" He laughed. Nim knew Tech was bird-dogging Maquina because Tech had told him. He wanted to be certain Nim, who changed women as often as he changed his underwear, had no designs on Maquina of his own. "What about her?"

"Well, don't take this too hard, old buddy, but scuttlebutt has it that there's a juicy vice-presidency in store for whoever wins the big one at the Coliseum."

"No problem," Tech said. "Me."

Nim ran his hand through his strawberry blond hair. "I can't decide if it's your modesty or your ability to foresee the future that I like most about you. Your modesty. Gotta be that."

Tech shrugged. "She's good at what she does, I'll admit that."

"But you're better."

"I'm luckier. They gave me reason. Maquina got stuck with faith."

Nim blinked. "I wouldn't underestimate faith if I were you. It's often hooked to passion, and no one's managed to get rid of either yet."

"Don't have to. They eventually get rid of themselves. Burn out."

"But the light of reason burns eternally?" said Nim.

"Now that we know how to regenerate brain cells, yes."

Nim raised his glass — he preferred liquids to powders — and said, "Just trying to help you out with a little advice."

"What advice? I didn't hear any advice."

Nim clucked. "If your unregenerated brain cells contain a shred of common sense, you'll stop cooperating with Maquina to improve her simulation. Or better yet, you'll keep pretending you're cooperating so you get the benefit of anything she can show you. But what you'll really start doing is looking for ways to do both her and her simulation in. The grapevine says it's terrific. As good as yours."

Tech felt a stab of jealousy in spite of himself, but he was careful not to show it. "Thanks for the tip."

Nim bowed his head with characteristic irony and said, "Anything to help out a friend. Even if you don't need it, you'd be a fool to turn it down."

"What, the vice-presidency? I'm not one to turn a promo down."

"Not the promo, you prick. You think I don't know that I'm talking to ambition's slave? My advice."

Tech took a hefty double-nostril snort and said, "I'll certainly bear it in mind."

Tech did not give Nim's counsel any thought until, two days later, he overheard a junior vice president in the executive lounge praising Maquina's work to Hastings, the president of Artifice Inc. As he passed Maquina's office on his way back to his own, his intention, he told himself, was to relay the v.p.'s compliment. But when he found the door unlocked, her office empty, an impulse of a different kind seized him.

When Maquina walked in a half an hour later, he started with surprise. He'd just finished the rather elementary task of rigging her office so that he'd be able to monitor her interviews with her client, Bondieu. She shared with Tech the substance of these interviews, anyway — as far as he knew. He reasoned that his suggestions as to how she should handle the sometimes difficult Bondieu would be improved if he were exposed to Bondieu directly.

"Tech!" Maquina exclaimed. Her hand smoothed her hair in that unconscious primping that betrays a woman's desire to please a man. "What are you doing here?"

"Waiting for you."

Her smile seemed warmer and more welcoming than usual. He couldn't

wait to escape to his own office where, when he arrived, the red light on the control board was flashing with the insistence of a police car's. He switched it off, booted up, activated the sensors, and waited for the three-dimensional image to appear.

Voltaire, brows furrowed, hands on his skinny hips, rose from the richly embroidered chair in his study at Cirey, the chateau of his long-term mistress, the Marquise du Châtelet. The place he had called home for fifteen years depressed him now that she was gone. And now the marquis, who didn't even have the decency to wait until his wife's body was cold, had informed him that he must leave.

"Get me out of here," he demanded of the scientist who finally answered his call. "I want to go to the café. I need to see the Maid."

The scientist leaned over the control board Voltaire was already beginning to resent, and smiled. "I didn't think she was your type. You showed a strong preference all your life for brainy women, like your niece and the Madame du Châtelet."

"I simply can't abide the company of stupid women. The only thing that can be said on their behalf is that they can be trusted. They're too stupid to practice deceit."

"Unlike Mme. du Châtelet?"

Voltaire drummed his fingers impatiently on the beautifully wrought walnut desk, a gift from Mme. du Châtelet. "True, she betrayed me. She paid dearly for it, too."

The scientist arched a brow. "With that young officer, you mean? The one who made her pregnant?"

"At forty-three, a married woman with three grown children has no business becoming pregnant!"

"You hit the roof when she told you — understandable but not very enlightened. Yet you didn't break off with her. You were with her throughout the birth."

Voltaire shrugged. He'd worried himself sick about the birth, which had proved amazingly easy. Yet nine days later, the most extraordinary woman he had ever known was dead. Of childbed fever. No one, not even his niece and housekeeper and former paramour, Mme. Denis, who took care of him till he died, had ever been able to take her place.

"She persuaded me that it would be unreasonable to break with a woman of exceptional breeding and talent merely for exercising the same rights that I enjoyed. Especially since I hadn't made love to her for months. The rights of man, she said, belonged to women too. Provided, *bien sûr,* they were of the aristocracy. I allowed her gentle reasonableness to persuade me." Voltaire rubbed his forehead, heavy with memories. "She was an exception to every rule. She understood Newton and Locke. She understood every word that I wrote. She understood *me.*"

"Why weren't you making love to her? Too busy going to orgies?"

"My dear sir, my participation in such festivities has been greatly exaggerated. It's true, I accepted an invitation to one such celebration of erotic pleasure in my youth. I acquitted myself so well, I was invited to return."

"Did you?"

"Certainly not. Once, a philosopher. Twice, a pervert."

"What *I* don't understand is why a man of your worldliness should be so intent on another meeting with the Maid."

"Her passion," Voltaire said, an image of the robust Maid rising clearly in his mind's eye. "Her courage and devotion to what she believed."

"But you possessed that trait as well."

Voltaire stomped his foot, but the floor made no sound. "Why do you speak of me in the past tense? I possess temperament. Do not confuse passion with temperament. Temperament is a matter of the nerves. Passion's borne from the heart and soul. The Maid dared cling to her vision with her whole heart and soul, despite the bullying of church and state. Her devotion to her vision, unlike mine, bore no taint of perverseness. She was the first Protestant. I've always preferred Protestants to papist absolutists — until I took up residence in Geneva, only to discover their public hatred of pleasure is as great as any pope's. Only Quakers do not privately engage in what they publicly claim to abjure. A hundred true believers cannot redeem millions of hypocrites."

"The Maid recanted," the scientist said. "She knuckled under to their threats."

Voltaire bristled with irritation. "They took her to a cemetery! Terrorized a credulous girl with threats of death and hell. Bishops, academicians — the most learned men of their time! Donkeys' asses, the lot! Browbeating the bravest woman in France, a woman whom they destroyed only to revere. Hypocrites! They require martyrs as leeches require blood. They thrive on self-sacrifice. Provided that the selves they sacrifice are not their own. And after forcing the Maid to forswear her manly clothes" — he fluffed his lilac ribbon as he spoke — "they deliberately left them in her cell to tempt her. They *wanted* her to go back on her recantation so they could destroy her! Villains are undone by what is worst in them, heroes by what is best. They played her honor and her bravery like a fiddle, swine plucking at a violin."

"You're defending her," the scientist said with a wry smile. "Yet in that poem you wrote about her, you depict her as a tavern slut, much older than she in fact was, a liar about her so-called voices, a superstitious but shrewd fool. The greatest enemy of the chastity she pretends to defend is a donkey, for chrissake. A donkey with wings!"

Voltaire smiled. "A brilliant metaphor for the Roman Church, *n'est-ce pas?* I had a point to make. She was simply the sword with which I drove it home. I had not met her then. I had no idea she was a woman of such great mysterious depths."

"Not depths of intellect," the scientist protested. "She's just a fifteenth-century peasant! She doesn't even have big tits!"

"No, no. Depths of the soul. I'm like a little stream. Clear because it is shallow. But she's a river, an ocean! Return me to Aux Deux Magots. She and the cute, wind-up *garçon* are the only society that I now have."

"She is your adversary," the scientist said. "A minion of those who uphold values that you fought all your life. To assure your victory over her in the Great Debate, I'm going to reprogram you, equip you with all the philosophical and scientific information rational people have developed in the four centuries since your death. Darwin, Freud, Einstein, Heisenberg, Leconte. The definitive treatise on the Big Bang. The GUT — general unified theory — that eluded us all for so long. Your reason must crush her faith. You must regard her as the enemy she is if civilization is to continue to advance along rational scientific lines."

His eloquence and impudence were rather charming, but they were not substitutes for Voltaire's fascination with the Maid. "I will refuse to read anything you give me until you reunite me with the Maid in the café."

The scientist had the audacity to laugh. "You don't get it. You have no choice. I'll download — feed — the information into you. You're nothing but a complex I myself have made. You'll have the information you must have to win whether you want it or not."

Voltaire bristled with resistance. He knew the accents of authority since he was first subjected to those of his father, a strict martinet who'd compelled him to attend mass and whose austerities had claimed the life of Voltaire's mother when Voltaire was only seven. The only way she could escape his father's discipline was to die. Voltaire had no intention of escaping this scientist in that way. His existence was far too valuable.

"I refuse to *use* any additional knowledge you give me unless you return me at once to the café."

The scientist regarded Voltaire the way Voltaire regarded his wigmaker — with haughty superiority. As if he knew Voltaire could not exist without his patronage. Though middle class in origin himself, Voltaire did not believe common people worthy of governing themselves. The thought of his wigmaker posing as a legislator was enough to make him never wear a wig again. To be seen similarly by this man of science was intolerable.

"Tell you what," said the scientist. "You compose one of your brilliant *lettres philosophiques* trashing the concept of the human soul, and I will reunite you with the Maid. But if you don't, you won't see her until the day of the debate. Do I make myself clear?"

Voltaire mulled the offer over. "Clear as a little stream," he said at last.

"I have no desire to see the skinny gentleman in the wig who thinks he's better than everyone else," the Maid told the sorceress called Maquina. "I much prefer the company of my own voices."

"He's quite taken with you," Madame la Sorcière said.

"I find that difficult to believe," she replied; though she could not help it, she smiled.

"Oh, but it's true. He's asked Tech — his re-creator — for an entirely new image. He lived, you know, to eighty-four. Tech decided to make him appear as he looked at thirty-two."

"He looks even older," the Maid observed, who found Monsieur Arouet's wig, lilac ribbon, and velvet breeches ludicrous.

"That's all been changed. Do see him. He's certainly eager to see you."

The Maid reflected. Monsieur Arouet would be far less repulsive if . . . "Did Monsieur Arouet have a different tailor as a young man?"

"Hmmm, I'm not sure. But that might be arranged."

"All right then," she agreed. "But I'm not going to the inn in these."

She held up her chains, recalling the fur cloak the king himself had placed about her shoulders at his coronation in Rheims. She thought of asking for it now, but decided against it. They had made much of her cloak during her trial, accusing her of having a demon-inspired love of luxury; she who, until she won the king over that day she first appeared at court, had felt nothing but coarse burlap against her skin. Her accusers, she noted, wore black satin and velvet and smelled of perfume.

"I'll do what I can," Madame la Sorcière vowed. "But you must agree not to tell Monsieur Bondieu. He doesn't want you fraternizing with the enemy, but I think it will do you good. Hone your skills in preparation for the Great Debate."

There was a pause in which the Maid felt as if she had fainted. When she recovered, she found herself seated in the Inn of the Two Worms surrounded by guests who, once again, seemed not to know that she was there.

The armor-plated beings bearing trays and clearing tableware darted among the guests. She looked for Garçon and spotted him gazing at the honey-haired cook, who pretended not to notice. Garçon's longing recalled the way the Maid herself had gazed at statues of St. Catherine and St. Margaret, who'd both forsworn men but adopted their attire.

She suppressed a smile when Monsieur Arouet appeared, wearing a dark unpowdered wig. He still looked old — about the age of her father Jacques Dars, thirty plus one or two — though younger than before. His shoulders slumped under the weight of many books. She'd only seen books twice, during her trials, and though they looked nothing like these, she recoiled at the memory of their power.

"*Alors,*" Monsieur Arouet said, setting the books before her. "Forty-two volumes. My *Selected Works.* Incomplete but" — he smiled — "for now, it will have to do. What's wrong?"

"Do you mock me? You know I cannot read."

"I know. Garçon 213-ADM is going to teach you."

"I do not want to learn. All books except the Bible are born of the devil."

Monsieur Arouet threw up his hands and lapsed into curses that resembled those her soldiers used when they forgot that she was near. "You *must* learn how to read. Knowledge is power!"

"The devil must know a great deal," she said, careful to let no part of the books touch her.

Monsieur Arouet, exasperated, turned to the sorceress and said, "For God's sake, can't you teach her anything?" Then he turned back to her. "How will you appreciate my brilliance if you can't even read? Had you been able to read, you'd have confounded those idiots who sent you to the stake."

"All learned men," she said. "Like you."

"No, *pucellette,* not like me. Not like me at all." She recoiled from the book he held out as if it were a serpent. Then he rubbed the book all over himself and Garçon. "It's harmless," he said. "See?"

"Evil is often invisible," she murmured.

"Monsieur is right," Garçon told her. "All the best people read."

"Had you been lettered," Monsieur Arouet said, "you'd have known that your inquisitors had absolutely no right to try you. You were a prisoner of war, captured in battle. Your English captor had no legal right to have your religious views examined by French inquisitors and academics. You pretended to believe your voices were divine —"

"Pretended!" she cried out.

"— and he pretended to believe they were demonic. The English are themselves too tolerant to burn anyone at the stake. They leave such forms of amusement to our countrymen, the French."

"Not too tolerant," the Maid said, "to turn me over to the Bishop of Beauvais, claiming I was a witch." She looked away, unwilling to let him peer in her eyes. "Perhaps I am. I betrayed my own voices."

"Voices of conscience, nothing more. The pagan Socrates heard them as well. Everyone does. But it's unreasonable to sacrifice our lives to them, if only because to destroy ourselves on their account is to destroy them too. Persons of good breeding betray them as a matter of course."

"Perhaps Monsieur's voices are soft," Garçon suggested. "Therefore, more easily ignored."

"I let them force me to admit my voices were the devil's," said the Maid, "when all the while I knew they were divine. Isn't that the act of a demon? A witch?"

"Listen!" Monsieur Arouet gripped her by the arms. "There *are* no witches. The only demons in your life were those who sent you to the stake. Ignorant swine, the lot! Except for your English captor, who pretended to believe you were a witch to carry out a shrewd, political move. When your garments had burned away, his dupes removed your body from the stake to show the crowd and the inquisitors you were indeed a female, who, if for no other reason than usurping the privileges of males, deserved your fate."

"Please stop!" she said. She thought she smelled the oily reek of smoke, although Monsieur Arouet had made Garçon place NO SMOKING signs throughout the inn. The room veered, whirled. "The fire." She gasped. "Its tongues —"

"That's enough," the sorceress said. "Can't you see you're upsetting her? Lay off."

But Monsieur Arouet persisted. "They examined your private parts after your garments burned away, just as they'd done before to prove you were the virgin that you claimed. And having satisfied their lewdness in the name of God, they returned you to the pyre and burned your flesh and bones to ashes. *That* was how your countrymen requited you for championing their king, for seeing to it France remained forever French. And having burned even your bones to ash, they held a hearing, cited some rural rumor that your heart had not been consumed in the fire, and promptly declared you a national heroine, the savior of France. I wouldn't be at all surprised if, by now, they have canonized you and revere you as a saint."

"In 1924," La Sorcière said.

Monsieur Arouet's splutter of scorn crackled in her ears as Garçon fanned her with one his metal hands. "Much good it did *her,*" he said to La Sorcière.

"I said, enough!" a woman's voice called out. But it was no one in the crowd of onlookers gathered around the stake.

"Fire." She gasped. Clutching the collar of mesh at her throat, she fled into the cool dark of oblivion.

"It's about time," Voltaire scolded Madame la Savante. "How dare you turn me off without my consent? I've been trying to reach you for hours."

"I haven't been ignoring you on purpose," she said in a cool, businesslike voice. "Tech — Mr. Hilliard — and I are being besieged by media people from all over the planet. There's someone from a space col we've never even heard of! Tech's talking to him now. I never dreamed the Great Debate would be the media event of the decade. They all want the same thing — a chance to interview you and the Maid."

Voltaire fluffed the apricot ribbon at his throat and said, "I refuse to be seen by them without my powdered wig."

"We're not going to let them see you or the Maid at *all.* They can talk to Tech all they want. He likes that kind of attention more than I do, and he handles it very well. He says public exposure will help his career. Look. I came as soon as my mechsec told me the light was on. To be honest, I thought it was the Maid. What's wrong? Are you losing?"

Voltaire, in his richly appointed rooms at Frederick the Great's court, was playing chess with the friar whom he employed to let him win. He was so overcome by an unprecedented attack of compassion that for a moment — just a moment — he was unable to speak.

"You were quite right. When you turned the Maid off. It's impossible to hold a rational conversation with her! Unfortunately, you could not shut her off without stilling me too. If there's one thing I cannot tolerate, it's being silenced before I have had my say."

He paused for maximum dramatic effect. He was a fine actor — everyone who'd heard him perform in his plays at Frederick's court said so. He knew a good scene when he saw one, and this one had the dramatic potential to be extremely good.

"Get rid of him and I will tell you why I called." He gestured at the good-natured friar, the only man of the cloth he had ever met that he could stand. "You are dismissed," he told him. "Go."

"Tech really should be handling this." Nevertheless, Madame la Savante clicked something on her control board and presto! the friar vanished.

Voltaire took a sip of Frederick's fine sherry and cleared his throat. "I want you to delete the Maid's memory of her final ordeal. It impedes our conversation as surely as bishops and state officials impede the publication of any intelligent work. Besides . . ." he paused, uncomfortable at the expression of any feelings except irritation at humankind's stupidity. "She's suffering. I cannot bear to see it. And while you're at it, delete from me too my memory of the eleven months I served in the Bastille. And all my frequent flights from Paris — not the flights themselves, mind you — my periods of exile constitute most of my life! Just delete their causes, not the effects."

"Well, I don't know —"

He slammed a fist down on an ornately wrought oak side table. "Unless you liberate me from past fears, I cannot write freely!"

"Simple logic —"

"Since when is logic simple? I simply can't compose my *lettre philosophique* on the absurdity of denying those like Garçon 213-ADM the rights of man on the grounds that they have no soul. He's an amusing little fellow, don't you think? And as smart as at least a dozen priests whom I have known. Does he not speak? Respond? Desire? He is infatuated with a human cook. Should he not be able to pursue happiness as freely as you or I? If he has no soul, then you have no soul either. If you have a soul, it can only be inferred from your behavior, and since we may make the identical inference from the behavior of Garçon, if you have a soul, so does he."

"I'm inclined to agree," Mme. la Savante said. "I can hardly wait to hear what you have to say in your *lettre.*"

"The point is, I cannot express myself completely freely on these sensitive matters unless you rid me of the memory of what I suffered for expressing my ideas. The truth is I never *did* express myself freely on many matters. Take that life-hating Puritan Pascal's views of original sin, miracles, and much other nonsense besides. I didn't dare say what I really thought! Always, I had to calculate what every assault on convention and traditional

stupidity would cost. And the Maid is hampered even more than I! For *her* convictions, she paid the ultimate price. Being crucified could be no worse than what she suffered at the stake. Light a cigarette in her presence and she becomes so confused that she can't articulate the nature of these voices that she claims to hear. Rational inquiries cannot be carried out in an atmosphere of fear and intimidation. If our contest is to be fair, I implore you in the name of justice and enlightenment, rid us of these terrors that prevent us from speaking our minds and from encouraging others to speak theirs. Else this debate will be like a race run with bricks tied to the runners' ankles."

Mme. la Savante did not respond at once. "I — I'd like to help, but I'm not sure I can."

Voltaire spluttered with scorn. "I know enough of your procedures to know you can comply with my request."

"Technically, your request poses no problem. But morally, I'm not at liberty to tamper with the Maid's program at whim."

Voltaire stiffened. "I realize Madame has a low opinion of my philosophy, but surely —"

"Not so! I think the world of you! You have a modern mind, one of the first and best our world has ever known. But your point of view, though valid as far as it goes, is limited because of what it leaves out and cannot address. And don't forget, I work for Artifice Inc. and the Preservers, for Monsieur Bondieu. I'm bound by the ethics of my profession to give them the Maid they want. Unless I can convince them to delete the Maid's memory of her martyrdom, I can't do it. And Tech would have to get permission from the company and the Skeptics to delete yours. He'd love to, I assure you. His Skeptics are more likely to consent than my Preservers. It would give you an advantage in addition to the two hundred years on the Maid that you already have."

"I quite agree," he conceded at once. "Relieving me of my burdens without relieving the Maid of hers would not be cricket. Neither Locke nor Newton would approve."

Mme. la Savante did not answer at once. "I'll talk to my boss and to Monsieur Bondieu," she said at last. "But I wouldn't hold my breath if I were you."

Voltaire smiled wryly and said, "Madame forgets I have no breath to hold."

The red light flashing on Tech's board stopped just as he entered his office. That meant Maquina must have answered it in hers. Tech bristled with suspicion. They had agreed not to talk to each other's re-creation alone, though each had already given the other the required programming to do it. The Maid never initiated communication, which meant the caller was Voltaire.

How dare Maquina boot up without him! He stormed out of the office to let her and Voltaire both know exactly what he thought of their conspiring

behind his back. But in the corridor he was besieged by cameras, TV-mechs, journalists, and reporters. It was fifteen minutes before he burst into Maquina's office and, sure enough, caught her closeted cozily with Voltaire — she'd reduced him from eight feet to human-size.

"You broke our pact!" he shouted. "What are you doing, trying to use his infatuation with that schizophrenic to make him throw the debate?"

Maquina, head buried in her hands, looked up. Her eyes glistened with tears. Tech felt something in him roll over, but he chose to ignore it. She actually blew Voltaire a kiss before shutting him off.

"I must say, I never thought you'd sink to this."

"To what?" Maquina asked. "What's gotten into you? You're not your usual jaunty self at all."

"What was that all about? What did he want?"

Within five minutes after Maquina had explained Voltaire's request, Tech was back in his office, booting Voltaire up.

"The answer is *no*!" he shouted at Voltaire. "I want the Rose of France wilting in her armor the day of the debate. It will remind her of her inquisition, which is exactly what I want. She'll start babbling nonsense and reveal to the planet just how bankrupt faith without reason is."

Voltaire stamped his foot. "*Merde alors*! We disagree! Never mind me, but I insist you delete the Maid's memory of her final hours so that her reasoning will not be compromised, as mine so often was, by fear of reprisals. And I demand you let me visit her and that odd *mais charmant* curiosity Garçon in the café at will. I've never known beings like either of them before, and they are the only society that I now have."

What about me? Tech thought. What about me? But what he said was, "I don't suppose it's occurred to you that the loser of the debate will be consigned forever to oblivion."

Voltaire blinked, his face giving nothing away.

"You can't fool me," Tech said. "I know you want more than just intellectual immortality — that, you have already obtained. I happen to recall that once, when you were well advanced in years, unforced by your father and of your own free will, you actually received Easter communion."

"I refused it at the end! All I wanted was to be left to die in peace!"

"Allow me to quote from your famous poem, 'The Lisbon Earthquake':

> Sad is the present if no future state,
> No blissful retribution mortals wait,
> If fate's decrees the thinking being doom
> To lose existence in the silent tomb."

Voltaire wavered. "True, I said that — and with what eloquence! But everyone who enjoys life longs to extend it."

"*Your* only chance at a 'future state' is to win the debate. It's against your

own best interest — and we all know how fond you've always been of that! — to delete the Maid's memory of being burned alive because that memory makes her vulnerable and more likely to break down. You can use it to your advantage in the Great Debate. And if you give me a hard time, I'm going to download into her that scurrilous poem you wrote about her."

" 'La Pucelle?' You wouldn't!"

"Wouldn't I! You'll be lucky if she ever speaks to you again."

"Monsieur forgets the Maid does not know how to read."

"I'll see to it she learns — or better yet, read it to her myself. She may be illiterate, but she damn sure isn't deaf!"

Voltaire frowned, reflecting. Tech knew he had him between Scylla and Charybdis. What was that eighteenth-century mind, sharp as a scalpel, plotting? Once the debate was over, Tech vowed to strip that mind down and study its cutting edge.

"I promise to produce *la lettre* if you will just let me see her once more. In return, you'll vow never to so much as *men*tion 'La Pucelle' to the Maid."

"No funny business," Tech warned. "I'm going to watch your every move."

"As you wish."

Tech returned Voltaire to the café, where Joan and Garçon 213-ADM were waiting. He'd barely called them up when he was momentarily distracted by a knock on his door — Nim.

"Coffee?"

"Sure." Tech glanced back at the café-sim. Let them visit a while. The more Voltaire knew, the sharper he'd be later. "Got any of that sensopowder? Been a tough day."

"Your orders," said Garçon 213-ADM, who was having difficulty following the arguments between the Maid and the Monsieur on whether beings like himself possessed a soul. Monsieur seemed to believe that no one had a soul — which so outraged the Maid that she demanded to be returned to her cell, saying the company of jailers was preferable to Monsieur's own. They argued with such heat, they did not notice that the scientist who usually watched them had disappeared.

Now was Garçon's chance to implore Monsieur to intervene on his behalf and ask his human masters to give him a name. 213-ADM was just a mechfolk code: 2 identified his function, mechwaiter; 13 placed him in a Paris café, and ADM stood for Aux Deux Magots. He was sure he'd have a better chance of attracting the honey-haired short-order cook's attention if he had a human name.

"Monsieur, Madame. Your orders, please."

"What good is ordering?" Monsieur snapped. Patience, Garçon observed, was not improved by learning. Mechfolk were in general more patient than their masters. "We go through the motions, but we cannot taste a thing!"

Garçon gestured sympathetically with two of his four hands. He had no experience of human senses except sight, sound, and rudimentary touch, those necessary to perform his job. He would have given anything to taste, to feel; humans seemed to derive such pleasure from it.

"My limitations exceed yours," he said gently. "I cannot follow your discussions, though I understand that their outcome will greatly affect me."

The Maid perused the menu and, changing the subject, said, "I'll have my usual. A crust of bread — I'll try a sourdough baguette crust for a change —"

"A sourdough baguette!" Monsieur echoed.

"— and, to dip it in, a bit of champagne."

Monsieur shook his hand as if to cool it off, then quoted himself as he was so fond of doing. "*J'aime le luxe, et même la mollesse.* Though a crust of a baguette may hardly be termed overindulgence!" Then he commended Garçon for doing such a fine job of teaching the Maid to read the menu.

"Madame la Savante permitted it," Garçon said; he did not want to get in trouble with his human masters, who could pull the plug on him at any time. "She said anything that we do ourselves is not a violation of her orders."

Monsieur waved a dismissive hand. "She's much too conscientious. She'd never survive on her own in Paris, much less at any royal court. Her counterpart — where did he go? — my God, are we alone? — he's far less hindered on that score. He'll go far. Lack of scruples is fortune's favorite handmaiden. I certainly did not proceed from penury to one of the wealthiest citizens in France by confusing ideals with scruples."

"Has Monsieur decided on his order?" Garçon asked.

"Yes. You're to instruct the Maid in more advanced texts so that she can read my poem, 'On the Newtonian Philosophy,' along with all my *Lettres philosophiques.* Her reasoning is to become as equal as possible with my own. Not that anyone's reason is likely to become so," he added with his cocky smile.

"Your modesty is equaled only by your wit," said the Maid, drawing from Monsieur a smirky laugh.

Garçon sadly shook his head. "I'm afraid that won't be possible. I am unable to instruct anyone except in simple phrases. My literacy permits comprehension of nothing beyond menus. I must decline Monsieur's past offer to become his amanuensis for the same reason. I'm honored by Monsieur's desire to advance my station. But even when opportunity knocks, I and my kind, consigned forever to the lowest levels of society, cannot answer the door."

"The lower classes ought to keep their place," Voltaire assured him. "But I'll make an exception in your case. You seem ambitious. Are you?"

Garçon glanced at the honey-haired cook. "Ambition is unsuited to one of my rank."

"What would you be then? If you could be anything you like?"

Garçon happened to know that the cook spent her three days a week off — Garçon himself worked seven days a week — in the corridors of the Louvre. "A mechguide at the Louvre," he said. "One smart enough, and with sufficient leisure, to court a woman who barely knows I exist."

"Leave it to me," Monsieur said. He had a tendency to overestimate his powers, impressive as these were. "I'll find a way to — how do they say it?"

"Download you," the Maid volunteered.

"*Mon dieu*!" Monsieur exclaimed. "Already she can read as well as you. But I will not have her wit exceed mine! That would be going too damned far indeed!"

Tech dissolved the packet of powderpower into his margarita, downed half of it, and waited for the rush.

"That bad?" said Nim. He signaled the Satellite mechmaid, ordered another packet, and dissolved it in what was left of Tech's drink.

"Voltaire," Tech said, arriving at the bottom of the glass. "He's supposed to be my creature, but half the time it feels as if I'm his. He has a will all his own. If Schopenhauer was right and will is soul, I've created a being with a soul. Maybe I programmed him all wrong."

"You programmed him all right," Nim said. "Forget Schopenhauer. He thought rocks had souls, for chrissake. Did you expect the irrepressible Voltaire not to give you a hard time? You represent authority. He battled authority all his life, and that's exactly how you've reconstructed him."

Tech ran his fingers through his wavy hair and gestured to the mechmaid to bring him another drink. "You can't imagine what dealing with him is like."

"Okay, so he's a temperamental Frenchman! Bottom line, though, he can't do anything you haven't programmed him to do. If he gets out of hand, go deep inside him. If you find anything in his construction resembling a will or a soul, all you have to do is delete it."

Tech scoffed. "Going in piecemeal to find his soul would be like cutting into a human brain in search of consciousness. And anyway, it's not just him." He took a deep breath and exhaled toward the transparent domed ceiling. "It's the debate."

"What about it?"

Tech met Nim's eyes. "I rigged Maquina's office. I eavesdrop on her meetings with Bondieu."

Nim slapped him on the shoulder. "Good for you!"

In spite of himself, Tech laughed. "That isn't all."

Nim leaned forward, boyishly curious.

"I think I went too far," Tech said.

"You don't mean to say you got caught!"

"No, no. You know how Maquina is. She doesn't suspect enemies of intrigue, much less friends."

"That's why she'd make a lousy vice president of R&D Experimental Simulations. Manipulating others isn't her strong suit."

"I'm not sure it's mine either," Tech said.

"With fifty grand a year increase and all the perks that go with it? It's yours, believe me, it's yours. So what else did you do?"

Tech shook his head with self-disapproval. "I updated Voltaire's memory. Darwin, Einstein, Dyson, Seultete, the works. He now knows everything we know. The Maid still has an early fifteenth-century mind, and an illiterate one at that. She's no Copernicus, you know."

Nim's eyes narrowed. "A stroke of genius," he said.

"An underhanded stroke," said Tech. "Maquina and I both agreed not to do it. Even Voltaire objected to being made unilaterally that smart."

"Does your client know?"

"Um-hmm. The Skeptics are all for it. I foresee no problem there."

"It's in the bag," Nim said. "It's in the bag."

Tech nervously toyed with his empty glass. "What I've done will become apparent at the Great Debate."

"I should hope so!" said Nim. "Why the hell else did you do it?"

"I feel like a shit."

"You are," said Nim approvingly. "What you need is a little recreation of another kind." He summoned a mechwench. Padded charms would help Tech forget for the moment all about Maquina, Voltaire, and the Maid.

"Now pay attention," Voltaire said when the scientist at last answered his call. He cleared his throat, flung out his arms, and readied himself to declaim the brilliant arguments he'd detailed in another *lettre* that would assure his immortality.

The scientist covered his eyes with his hands to block out the light and turned down the volume on his control board.

"What's wrong with you?" Voltaire asked. "Don't you want to hear my *lettre*?"

"Hangover. Too much drugdrink."

"You've discovered a single general theory uniting the electromagnetic, strong, weak and gravitational force — and have no cure for hangover?"

"Or colds either." The scientist's voice sounded ragged.

"*J'aime la mollesse,*" Voltaire paraphrased "Le Mondaine," his poem in praise of worldly pleasures. "But overindulgence does have its price."

"Tell me about it," the scientist said, slapping an icederm on his neck.

"In view of your condition, instead of reciting my *lettre* verbatim, I'll just give an informal summary of its contents."

"Very kind of you, yes."

Voltaire clicked his heels together, then bowed in the Prussian way he'd learned at Frederick the Great's court. "The doctrine of a soul depends on the idea of a fixed and immutable self. No evidence supports the notion of a

stable 'I,' an essential ego-entity lying beyond each individual existence."

"True," said the scientist, "though odd, coming from you."

"Don't interrupt me, please. Now, how can we explain the stubborn illusion of a fixed self or soul? Through five functions, themselves conceptual processes and not fixed elements. First, all beings possess physical, material qualities, which change so slowly that they appear to be fixed, but which are actually in constant material flux."

"The soul's supposed to outlast those," the scientist said. He pinched the bridge of his nose with his thumb and forefinger.

"I'll get to that; don't interrupt. Second, there is the illusion of a fixed emotional makeup, when actually feelings, as even that rude playwright Shakespeare pointed out, wax and wane as inconstantly as the moon. They too are in constant flux, though no doubt these motions, just like the moon's, obey physical laws."

"We know a few of them," the scientist said. "But we've still got a long way to go. In any event, not my area of expertise."

Voltaire suppressed his irritation at the scientist's dull-witted interruptions. Any audience, even one that insisted on participating, was better than none. "Third, the phenomenon of perception. The senses, upon examination, also turn out to be processes, in constant motion, not in the least fixed."

"The soul's supposed to outlast them as well."

"Fourth," Voltaire continued, determined to ignore the scientist's banal interpolations, "there is in every individual a constellation of habits that develops over the years. But these too are made up of constant flowing action. Despite the appearance of repetition, there's nothing fixed or immutable here."

"Drinkdrugging habits too?" the scientist said. "They seem pretty immutable to me."

"Nonsense. They're just as subject to time and change as everything else. Finally, there is the phenomenon of consciousness, the so-called soul itself, which is believed by priests and fools — a redundancy, that — to be detachable from the four phenomena I've named. But consciousness itself exhibits all those characteristics of flowing motion of the other four. Now, all five of these functions are constantly grouping and regrouping. The body itself is forever in a state of flux, and so is everything else. Permanence is an illusion. Heraclitus was absolutely right. You cannot set foot into the same river twice. The hungover man I'm regarding now is not the same hungover man I am regarding *now*. Everything is always in a state of dissolution and decay —"

"You can say that again."

"— as well as in a state of solution and growth. Consciousness itself cannot be separated from its contents. We are pure deed. There is no doer. The dancer can't be separated from the dance. Science after my time confirms this view. Looked at closely, the atom itself disappears. There *is* no atom,

strictly speaking. There is only what the atom does. Function is everything. Ergo, there is no fixed, absolute entity commonly known as soul."

"Hmmm," said the scientist.

"Since artificial intelligences like Garçon exhibit all the functional characteristics I have named — material qualities, emotional sensitivity, sensory perception, habitual behavior and, so it would appear, consciousness — it isn't reasonable to withhold from them access to the rights that we ourselves enjoy, allowing, *bien sûr,* for class differences. If farmers, shopkeepers, and wigmakers are granted privileges equal with those of dukes and earls, regardless of individual merit and talent, it is irrational to withhold such privileges from artificially intelligent beings like Garçon."

"If there's no soul, there's obviously no reincarnation of it either, right?"

"My dear sir, to be born twice is no more odd than to be born once."

This startled the scientist. "But what's reincarnated? What crosses over from one life to the next? If there's no fixed, absolute self? No soul?"

Voltaire made a note in the margin of his *lettre.* "If you memorize my poems — which for your own enlightenment I urge you do — do they lose anything you gain? If you light a candle from another candle's flame, what crosses over? In a relay race, does one runner give up anything to the other? His position on the course, no more." Voltaire paused for dramatic effect. "Well? What do you think?"

The scientist clutched his head and said, "I think you're going to win the debate."

Voltaire, noting the scientist's pleasure with his performance along with the scientist's stupefied discomfort, decided now was the time to put forward his request. "But to assure my victory, I must compose an additional *lettre,* more technical, for types who equate verbal symbols with mere rhetoric, with empty words."

"Have at it," said the scientist.

"For that," Voltaire said, "I will need your help."

"You got it."

Voltaire smiled cannily. "You must download into me everything you yourself know of computer electronics. This will not merely spare you an immense amount of work, it will enable me to write a technical *lettre* aimed at converting specialists and experts to our point of view. The truth is, even the Newtonian calculations I brought to France perplexed my brain, which isn't meant for algebra."

"Calculus," the scientist corrected dimly.

"I must have state-of-the-art instruction in computer electronics, specializing in simulated intelligence; the technical equivalent of Diderot's *Encyclopédie.*"

Clutching his temples, the scientist slumped forward over his control board with a moan. "Only if you promise not to call me for at least the next ten hours."

"*Mais oui,*" said Voltaire with an impish smile. "Monsieur requires time — how do you say it *en anglais*? — to sleep it off."

Maquina waited nervously for her turn on the agenda of the executive meeting of Artifice Inc. She sat opposite Tech, contributing nothing to the discussion, as colleagues and superiors discussed this aspect and that of the company's operation. Her mind was elsewhere, but not so far gone as to fail to notice the hair on the back of Tech's hands, a single vein that pulsed — sensuous music — in his neck.

As the president of Artifice Inc. dismissed all those not directly involved in the P. S. (Preserver-Skeptic) Project, Maquina assembled the notes she'd prepared to present her case. Of those present, she knew she could count only on Tech's support. But she was confident that, with it, the others would go along with her proposal.

The day before, she told the Special Projects Committee, for the first time, the Maid had broken her reclusive pattern. She initiated contact instead of waiting to be summoned with her usual air of reluctance. She'd been deeply disturbed to learn from Monsieur Arouet that she must defeat him in what she called "the trial" or be consigned once again to oblivion.

When Maquina had acknowledged that that was probably true, the Maid became convinced that she was going to be cast again into "the fire." Disoriented and confused, she begged Maquina to allow her to retire to consult her "voices."

Several hours later, the red light had flashed for Maquina again. This time the Maid requested high-level reading skills so that she might compete with her "inquisitor" on a more equal footing.

"I explained to her that I couldn't alter her programming without this committee's consent."

"What about your client?" the president wanted to know.

"Monsieur Bondieu found out — he wouldn't tell me how, a press leak, I suspect — that Voltaire is to be her rival in the debate. Far from having to persuade him to alter her historicity, he's now threatening to take the account to Yamamoto in Japan — unless I download into her the additional two centuries of information Voltaire has."

"Does your client know we're handling Voltaire for the Skeptics as well as the Maid for him?"

Maquina shook her head.

"Thank the Cosmic X for that," said the executive vice president of Special Projects."

"Tech?" the president asked, his eyebrows raised.

Since Tech had once suggested the very course Maquina now proposed, she assumed his accord — and was stunned when he said, "I'm against it. France and the planet want a verbal duel between intuitive faith and inductive/deductive reason. Update the Maid's memory bank, and all we

will succeed in doing is muddying the issue."

"Tech!" Maquina cried out.

Heated discussion followed. Tech fired one objection after another at everyone who favored the idea. Except Maquina, whose gaze he carefully avoided. When it became apparent no consensus would be reached, the president made the decision in Maquina's favor.

Maquina pressed her advantage. "I'd also like permission to delete from the Maid's programming her memory of being burned alive at the stake. Her fear that she'll be sentenced to a similar fate again makes it impossible for her to present the case for faith as freely as she could if that memory didn't darken her thoughts."

"I object," Tech said. "Martyrdom is the only way a person can become famous without ability. The Maid who did not suffer martyrdom for her beliefs isn't the Maid of history at all. To delete her memory of that experience would be like re-creating Christ without his crucifixion."

Maquina glared at Tech, who addressed his observations to the president, as if she did not exist. "I'm willing to let Voltaire be deleted of all he suffered at the hands of authority, too."

"I'm not," said Tech. "Voltaire without defiance of authority would not be Voltaire."

Maquina let the other committee members argue the point, nonplused by the incomprehensible change in Tech. She accepted her superiors' final decision, a compromise, because she had no choice. The Maid's information bank would be updated, but she would not be allowed to forget her fiery death, nor would Voltaire be allowed to forget the constant fear of reprisals from church and state authorities that tempered his views and harnessed his thought.

"You shit," said Maquina to Tech under her breath as they both left the conference room.

Unresponsive to the presence of Madame la Sorcière, the Maid sat upright in her cell, eyes closed as she listened to warring voices peal inside her head. The noise was like the din of battle, chaotic and fierce, but if she just listened intently, refusing to allow her immortal spirit to be ripped from her mortal flesh, a divinely orchestrated polyphony, as in the mass she'd heard in the cathedral at Rouen, would show her her course.

The Archangel Michael, St. Catherine, and St. Margaret, from whose mouths her voices often spoke, were reacting fiercely to her involuntary mastery of Monsieur Arouet's *Complete Works.* Particularly offensive to Michael was the *Eléments de Newton,* whose philosophy Michael perceived to be incompatible with that of the Church and with his own existence. The Maid herself was not so sure. She found, to her surprise, a poetry and harmony in the equations that proved — as if proof were required — the unsurpassed reality of God, whose physical laws might be fathomable but whose

purposes were not.

Far more offensive to her than the new wisdom was that its author was an Englishman. "*La Henriade,*" she told Michael, citing another of Monsieur Arouet's works, "is more repulsive than *Les Eléments.* How dare Monsieur Arouet, who arrogantly calls himself Voltaire, maintain that in England reason is free, while in our own beloved France, it's shackled to the dark imaginings of absolutist priests! Was it not Jesuit priests who first taught this inquisitor how to reason?"

But what enraged the Maid most of all and made her thrash and strain at her chains until, fearing for her safety, La Sorcière freed her ankles and wrists, was his illegally printed, scurrilous poem about her. As soon as she was sure her voices had withdrawn, she waved a copy of "La Pucelle" at the sorceress, incensed that the chaste Catherine or Margaret might be forcibly exposed to its lewdness. Both saints had already reproached her for her silly, girlish speculations about how attractive Monsieur Arouet might be — what was she thinking! — if he removed his ridiculous wig and got rid of his lilac ribbons.

"How dare Monsieur Arouet represent me this way?" she railed, knowing full well that her stubborn refusal to call him Voltaire irked him no end. "He adds nine years to my age, dismisses my voices as outright lies, and slanders Baudricourt, who first enabled me to put before my king my vision for both him and France. A writer of preachy plays and irreverent slanders against the faithful like *Candide,* he well may be, but that insufferable know-it-all calls himself an historian! If his other historical accounts are no more reliable than the one he gives of me, they and not my body deserve the fire. Newton's wisdom is an intriguing vision of God's laws, but Voltaire's history is a work of his imagination, made up of three parts bile, two spleen." She raised her right arm in the same gesture she'd used to lead her soldiers and the knights of France into battle against the English king and his minions of whom, she now saw clearly, Monsieur Arouet de Voltaire was one. A warrior *femme inspiratrice* with an intense aversion to the kill, she now vowed all-out war against this "nouveau-riche bourgeois upstart darling of the aristocratic class, who's never known real want or need, and thinks horses are bred with carriages behind them."

"Get him!" La Sorcière raged, ablaze with the Maid's fire.

"Where is he?" demanded the Maid. "Where is this shallow little *pissoir* stream that I may drown him in the depths of all I have suffered and known!"

Voltaire cackled with satisfaction when the café appeared, independent of his human masters' consent or knowledge. He made it disappear and reappear three times to make sure that he had mastered the technique. What fools these rulers were, to think that they could make the great Voltaire a creature of their will! But now came the real test, the intricate procedure

that would bring forth the Maid in all her womanly unfathomability, which he was determined to fathom.

"You scum," she said, lance drawn.

It was not quite the greeting he'd expected, but when he saw the copy of "La Pucelle" dangling on the point of her lance, he understood at once. He'd intended for her to read only the forty-two volumes of his *Selected Works,* from which "La Pucelle," despite its popularity — a French editor — had been omitted. "*Chère pucellette,*" he cooed. "I can explain."

"That's your whole problem," the Maid said. "You explain and explain and explain. Your plays are more tedious than the sermons I was forced to listen to in the cemetery at St. Ouen, and your railings against the sacred mysteries of the Church reveal a sharp but shallow and unfeeling mind bereft of awe and wonder."

"You mustn't take it personally," Voltaire pleaded. "It was directed at hypocritical reverence for you and at the supersitions of religion. My friend Thieriot added passages more profane and obscene than any I had written. He needed money. He made a living reciting the poem in various salons. My poor virgin became an infamous whore, made to say gross and intolerable things."

The Maid did not lower her lance. Instead, she poked it several times against Voltaire's satin waistcoated chest.

"*Chérie,*" he said. "If you knew how much I paid for this vest."

"You mean, how much *Fred*erick paid, that pitiful, promiscuous, profligate pervert of a man."

"Alliteration a bit heavy," Voltaire said, "but otherwise, a quite nicely turned phrase." His newly gained skills meant he could divest her of her lance at once, but he preferred persuasiveness to force. He quoted, with some liberty, that pleasure-hating Christian, Paul. "When I was a child, I spoke as a child, thought as a child, behaved as a child. But when I became a *wo*man, I put away manly things." Remembering how her inquisitors had claimed that her acceptance of the gift of a fine cloak was incompatible with the divine origin of her voices, Voltaire produced a Chantilly lace gown and a richly embroidered cloak.

"You mock me," the Maid said. But not before he saw a gleam of interest flare up in the coal of her dark eyes.

"I long to see you as you are." He held out the gown and cloak. "Your spirit I have no doubt is divine, but your natural form, like mine, is human; unlike mine, a woman's."

"You think I could give up the freedom of a man for that?" She impaled the cloak and gown on the tip of her lance.

"Not the freedom," Voltaire said. "Just the armor and clothes."

She didn't answer, but he got the impression that she was thinking it over. "Another little trick I've learned since we last met. *Voilà.* I can produce Garçon."

Garçon appeared out of nowhere, all four of his hands free. The Maid, who had indeed once worked in a tavern, could not help it: she smiled. She also removed the gown and cloak from the lance, tossed the lance aside, and caressed the clothes.

" 'For I am man and justly proud/In human weakness to have part;/Past mistresses have held my heart,/I'm happy still when thus aroused.' "

"I don't get it," Garçon said.

"But you soon will," Voltaire assured him. "I've learned how to reprogram you. You can become a Louvre guide, my personal anamuensis, anything you like. If you don't mind a suggestion, wigmaking's a lucrative trade. Not only is there no immortal soul, just try getting a wigmaker on Sundays!"

Garçon gazed at Monsieur and at the Maid, who had become regular customers at the café. He placed both his right hands over the site where humans are supposed to have a heart. "Monsieur, Mademoiselle, I appreciate your kindness, but I fear I must refuse. I cannot accept such a privilege for myself alone while my fellow mechfolk are doomed to toil in unsatisfying, dead-end jobs."

"He has a noble soul!" the Maid exclaimed.

"Yes, but his brain leaves much to be desired. There has to be an underclass to do the dirty work of the elite. Creating mechfolk of limited intelligence is an ideal solution!"

"With all due respect," said Garçon, "unless my meager understanding fails me, Monsieur and Mademoiselle are themselves nothing more than beings of limited intelligence, created by human masters to work for the elite. By what inherent right are you made more intelligent and privileged than I and others of my class? Do *you* have a soul? Should *you* be entitled to equal rights with humans, including the right to intermarry —"

The Maid made a face. "Disgusting thought."

"— to vote, to have equal access to the most sophisticated programming available?"

"This machine man makes more sense than many dukes I've known," said the Maid. A thoughtful expression furrowed her brow.

"I shall not have two peasants contradict me," said Voltaire. "The Rights of Man are one thing; the rights of the lower orders, another."

Garçon managed to exchange a look with the Maid before Monsieur, in a fit of pique, vowed to put the Maid in her place at the debate, and vanquished both her and Garçon from the screen.

Tech tuned Nim in on the interoffice screen and said, "From now on, he'll be able to say anything he wants. I've deleted every scrape with authority he ever had."

"Attaway," said Nim, grinning.

"Think I should delete run-ins with his father, too?"

"I'm not sure," Nim said. "What were they like?"

"Pretty hot. His father was a strict disciplinarian, sympathetic to the Jansenist view."

"What the fuck is a Jansenist?"

"A Catholic version of a Protestant. You know, sin's everywhere, pleasure's disgusting, especially the pleasures of the flesh."

"Those are only disgusting when they're done right."

Tech laughed. "It may have been through his old man that he first experienced the threat of censorship."

Nim paused to reflect. "What the hell," he said after awhile. "Might as well go for broke. Can't hurt."

Maquina sat beside Monsieur Bondieu in the Great Coliseum at Paris. Among four hundred thousand other spectators, she anxiously awaited the appearance of the Maid and Voltaire on a gigantic screen. It might have been a Roman gladiatorial match, except that visibility — the holograms stood three hundred feet high — was much improved, and people in the twenty-second century A.D. had grown too civilized to draw real blood.

War had been outlawed eighty years before in the Planetary Personhood Treaty of New York. Twenty years passed before the Planetary Force was established to enforce decisions of the Supreme Planetary Court, to which all nation-states were subject. Fierce trade wars, athletic contests, and debates had replaced violence as a means of settling international disputes.

The Great Debate, touted as the planetary media event of the century, was being watched by virtually every household in the civilized world. Mechbookies circulated freely through the crowd, taking last-minute bets, but Maquina refused to make one. So did the president and other top-ranking executives of Artifice Inc. who, in view of their representation of both participants, deemed it tactless to speculate as to the outcome.

The president, to demonstrate neutrality, sat between Maquina and Tech, who had not spoken to each other since the meeting. On Tech's far side his client, the Skeptics' representative, scanned the program; next to him, Tech's good friend Nim mouthed the words of the Planetary Anthem four hundred thousand people now stood for. He was partial to the "Star Spangled Banner" and sat down as the first chords from the "Marseillaise" sounded; Monsieur Bondieu's look made him rise at once.

As soon as the French national anthem ended, Monsieur Bondieu gave Maquina a nudge. "That can't be what I think it is," he said.

Maquina followed his eyes to a distant row at the back where what looked like a mechman sat quietly beside a human girl. Only licensed mechvendors, mechushers, and mechbookies were allowed in the stadium to attend The Great Debate.

"Probably her servant," Maquina said. Minor infractions of the rules did

not disturb her as they did Monsieur Bondieu, who'd been especially testy since a 3-decaster leaked the news that Artifice Inc. was representing both the Preservers and Skeptics. Fortunately, the leak occurred too late for either party to do anything about it.

"Mechserves aren't allowed to attend," Monsieur Bondieu observed.

"Maybe she's handicapped," Maquina said — an effort to placate Monsieur Bondieu. "I'm sure they make exceptions in that case."

"He won't understand what's going on, anyway," said Tech, directing his remark to Monsieur Bondieu.

"Precisely why it has no business here," replied Monsieur Bondieu.

Tech beeped for a mechbookie and ostentatiously placed a bet on Voltaire to win.

"He's never won a bet in his whole life," Maquina told Monsieur Bondieu.

"Is that so?" Tech said, leaning forward to address Maquina directly for the first time. "Why don't you put your money where your mouth is?"

Monsieur Bondieu did not approve of gambling, but he voiced no objection when Maquina made a modest bet.

"Mere tokenism," Tech chided her, "considering what you're being paid for this project."

"The same as you," said Maquina.

"Will you two cut it out," Nim said.

"Tell you what," said Tech. "I'll bet my entire salary for the project on Voltaire. You bet yours on your anachronistic Maid."

"Hey," Nim said. "Hey."

The president deftly addressed Tech's client, the Skeptic, and his rival, Bondieu. "It's this keen competitive spirit that's made Artifice Inc. the planet's leader in simulated intelligences. We try to —"

"You're on," said Maquina, whose dealings with the Maid had caused her to conclude that the irrational must have a place in the human equation, too.

Voltaire, who loved an audience, had never in his life appeared before one as huge as the one now spread at his feet. Although tall in his former life, he felt that only now, gazing down at the multitudes from his hundred-meter height, had he achieved the stature he deserved. He patted his powdered wig and fussed with the shiny satin ribbon at his throat. The crowd roared when, with a gracious flourish of his hands, he made a deep bow before them, as if he'd already given the performance of his life. He glanced at the Maid, concealed from the audience behind a shimmering partition in the far corner of the screen. She folded her arms, pretending to be unimpressed.

Voltaire let the crowd cheer and stamp, ignoring boos and hisses from approximately half of those present — at least half of his countrymen had always been fools. He was not one to prematurely cut off adulation he knew was his due. Was he not the epitome of the French intellectual tradition, the

greatest man of letters France had ever known, returning to his native land after an absence of over four hundred years? It was his destiny to shine; theirs, to applaud his brilliance.

When the moderator finally pleaded for silence — a bit too soon; Voltaire would take that up with him later — Voltaire placed his hand over his heart. He began his recital in the declamatory style so dear to eighteenth-century Parisian hearts: the soul, like God, no matter how it was defined, could not be demonstrated to exist; its existence was inferred. The truth of the inference lay beyond rational proof, nor was there anything in nature that required it, as he would demonstrate via the natural philosophies of Messieurs Newton, Darwin, Einstein, Heisenberg, and, more recently, those of Seultete, Sindios, Kopfschmerz, and Pasallah of Big Bang and general unified theory fame.

Far away in the stands, Maquina turned to Tech and said, "Darwin, Einstein, Seultete! You cheated!"

"God will not be mocked!" Monsieur Bondieu chanted. "Faith shall prevail!"

And yet, Voltaire continued to pontificate, there was nothing more obvious in nature than the work of an intelligence greater than man's, which man is able, within limits, to decipher. That man can decode nature's secrets proves what the church fathers and all the founders of the world's great religions have always said: that man's intelligence is a reflection of that same divine intelligence which authored nature. Were this not so, natural philosophers could not discern the laws behind creation, either because there would be none or because man would be so alien to them that he could not discern them. The very harmony between natural law and our ability to discover it strongly suggests that sages and priests of all persuasions are essentially correct in arguing that we are but the creatures of an almighty power, whose power is reflected in us. And this reflection in us of that power may be justly termed our universal, immortal, yet individual souls.

"You're praising priests!" the Maid exclaimed. She added something else, but Voltaire could not hear it above the pandemonium that broke out in the crowd.

"Incredible!" the moderator cried. "Voltaire, archenemy of spiritual authority and faith, actually seems to be contending that man has an immortal soul!"

"The operation of chance," Voltaire concluded, "in biological evolution and in the behavior of subatomic particles, in no way proves that nature and man, who is part of nature and as such a reflection of its creator, are merely somehow accidental. Chance is one of the principles through which natural law works. That principle may be said to correspond with the traditional religious view that man, like subatomic matter/energy, under certain conditions, is free to chart his own course. But this freedom, even when apparently random — randomness itself — obeys statistical laws in a way

that man can comprehend. Uncertainty is certain. Certainty is uncertain. Man is, like nature itself, free and determined both at once — as religious sages have been telling us for centuries, though, to be sure, they use a different vocabulary, far less precise than ours. Much mischief and misunderstanding between religion and science stem from that."

"Ladies and gentlemen!" the moderator cried. "An absolutely unforeseen turn of events is taking place here in this Great Coliseum before your very eyes today! Reactions from those in attendance range from perplexity and confusion to anger and even rage!"

"I've been greatly misunderstood," Voltaire resumed. "I'd like to take this opportunity to apologize for distortions resulting because all I said and wrote focused only on errors of faith, not on its intuited truths. But I lived during an era in which errors of faith were rife, while reason's voice had to fight to be heard. Now, the opposite appears to be true. Reason mocks faith. Reason shouts while faith whispers. As the execution of France's greatest and most faithful heroine proved, faith without reason is blind. But, as the superficiality and vanity of much of my life and work prove, reason without faith is lame."

Those who had previously booed and hissed now cheered, while those who had applauded booed and hissed. Voltaire stole a look at the Maid to see how she was reacting.

Far below, lost in the crowd, Nim turned to Tech and said, "What the hell does he think he's doing?"

"Damned if I know."

"Yeah," Nim said, "maybe literally."

"God won't be mocked!" Monsieur Bondieu cried out. "Faith shall prevail!"

"Voltaire," the moderator cried, "is actually relinquishing the podium to his rival — or should I say, former rival? — to the amazed delight of hundreds of thousands of Preservers here today in the Great Coliseum, and to the horrified disbelief of Skeptics. Oh, what a surprise this debate is turning out to be!"

"I don't get it," Nim said to Tech. "Do you?"

Tech recalled the words he had spoken at the meeting.

"Voltaire, divested of his anger at authority, is and is not Voltaire." He turned to Monsieur Bondieu. "My god. You may be right."

"No, *my* God!" snapped Monsieur Bondieu. "He's never wrong."

The Maid rose from behind the shimmering partition that till now had concealed her presence from the crowd. Shock waves coursed through the masses at her feet, swaying them like wheat in a storm.

"Monsieur is absolutely right!" she thundered across the stadium. "Nothing in nature is more obvious than that both nature and man do indeed possess a soul!"

Skeptics hooted. Some Preservers cheered. Others, who equated the belief that nature has a soul with paganism, scowled, suspecting a trap.

"Anyone who has seen the countryside near my home village, Domremy, or the great church at Rouen will testify that nature, the creation of an awesome power, and man, the creator of marvels, both possess intense consciousness, a soul!"

She waited for the crowd of supposedly civilized souls to calm themselves so that she could proceed.

"But what my brilliant friend has *not* addressed is how the fact that man possesses a soul he himself ackowledges to be immortal, universal yet unique, relates to the question at hand: namely, whether artificial intelligences, such as his own, possess a soul."

The crowd stamped, booed, cheered, hissed, and roared. Objects the Maid could not identify sailed through the air. Police officers appeared, accompanied by mechcops, and began to pull some people from the crowd.

The Maid waited until the moderator signaled for her to resume.

"The soul of man is divine!" she cried out.

Preservers screamed approval. Skeptics shouted denials.

"It is immortal!"

The din was so great that people covered their ears with their hands to muffle the noise of which they themselves were the source.

"And unique," Voltaire coached from the sidelines. "For God's sake, don't forget unique."

"It is unique!" she shouted, with the same intensity that had marked all her battle cries. "No other being on earth possesses a soul like man's!"

Voltaire shot to his feet beside her — "I agree!" — and the crowd went wild.

The Maid tuned out the raving masses of people shouting at her enormous feet and regarded the man who called himself Voltaire with bemused, affectionate doubt. Instead of running through the standard litany of religious arguments she had prepared, she happened to spot, far away in the most distant reaches of the stadium, a being who looked suspiciously like her fellow peasant with the noble heart, Garçon. Recalling his compassionate refusal to let himself advance while his mechfolk remained behind, she found herself unable to argue for any course that would deprive such a noble creature of the rights even the lowest and most common human beings now enjoyed. She yielded the floor to Voltaire, who, in discussion, had a lust for the last word.

Voltaire cited Newton, but he made a few interpretational mistakes.

"No, no," she interrupted. "That isn't what the formulas suggest at all!"

"Must you embarrass me in front of the largest audience I've ever known?" Voltaire whispered. "Is it my fault I never did have a good head for algebra?" Sulking, he yielded the floor to her.

"Calculus," she corrected. But softly, so that only he could hear. "It's not

the same thing at all."

To her own astonishment and the rising hysteria of the crowd, she found herself explaining Newton's elements, Einstein's special and general relativity, Heisenberg's Uncertainty Principle, Seultete's definitive Big Bang, and Kopfschmerz and Pasallah's unified theory — all with a fiery passion she'd not known since spurring her horse into battle on the sacred, glorious soil of her native land.

"Incredible." Voltaire clicked his tongue. "That you of all people should have a natural talent for math."

Ignoring shouts of "Freethinker! Heretic! Witch!" the Maid noticed again Garçon. She could barely make him out from such a distance, despite her immense height. Yet she felt he was watching her the way she'd watched Bishop Cauchon, the most relentless among her oppressors. But the good bishop, at the end, must have been touched by God's grace and Christ's merciful compassion, for she recalled no harm coming to her as a result of her trial.

Suddenly, a great light appeared before her eyes. All three of her voices, even above the jangling din of the tremendous crowd, spoke to her in a voice as clear as Voltaire's little stream.

"It is true," she addressed the crowd, trusting the voices to speak through her, "that only God can make a soul! But just as God endowed his creature, man, with an immortal soul, so Christ, out of his infinite love and compassion, could not deny a soul to artificially intelligent beings. It is not merely just but also merciful and kind to grant artificially intelligent beings the same rights and privileges accorded now to all humanity." She had to shout her final words over the roaring crowd. "Even wigmakers!"

"Heretic!" someone yelled.

"Apostate!"

"Traitor!"

Another cried out, "The original sentence was right! She ought to be burned at the stake again!"

"Again?" the Maid echoed. She turned to Voltaire and said, "What do they mean, again?"

Voltaire casually brushed a speck of lint from his embroidered satin waistcoat. "I haven't the slightest idea. You know how fanciful and perverse human beings are." With a sly wink, he added, "Not to mention, irrational."

"*I* cheated?" Tech said to Maquina. "Joan of Arc explaining gravitational theory? *I* cheated?"

"You started it!" Maquina said. "You think I don't know when my office has been rigged? You think you're dealing with an amateur?"

"Well, I —"

"You think because I'm a woman, I am incapable of cunningly competing for advancement the way you and Nim do?"

"No, I —"

"You think because I'm too highly developed to court fame like you and Voltaire, I'm not as smart as you are? Not as talented? Not as bright-eyed and bushy-tailed?"

"This is scandalous!" said Monsieur Bondieu. "What did you do, bewitch her? It's enough to make me believe in witchcraft!"

"You mean to say you *don't* ?" Tech's client said, a planet-renowned Skeptic. At that moment, he ducked, but a flying object hit him on his cerebral cortex, anyway. He and Bondieu began to argue, adding their heated bickering to the indignant ravings of the crowd. Even the moderator's voice over the public-address system now waxed hysterical.

The president of Artifice Inc., who'd been gripping his throbbing temples for some time, murmured, "We're ruined. We'll never be able to live this down."

Maquina's attention was diverted as the mechman she had noticed earlier, holding his honey-haired, human companion's hand, rushed down the aisle toward the screen. As it passed by, one of its three free hands happened to brush her skirt.

"*Pardon,*" it said in French, pausing just long enough for Maquina to read the mechstamp on its chest.

"Did that thing dare to touch you?" Monsieur Bondieu asked. His face swelled with rage.

"No, no, nothing like that," said Maquina as the mechman, pulling his human companion with him, fled toward the screen.

"Do you know him?" Tech asked.

"In a way," Maquina replied. He worked at a famous Parisian café, which Maquina frequented on her business trips to France. She'd modeled Garçon 213-ADM after him just as she'd modeled the Maid after Joan of Arc. Like all artists, sim-programmers borrowed from life; they didn't create it.

Garçon elbowed his way down the jammed aisle, past screaming, cheering, jeering people — toward the strangely familiar images on the screen. The coliseum crowd had exploded, and Garçon, whose metal parts were sensitive, did not want any flak hitting him. He held Amana tightly by the hand, pulled her along, but his wheels were not made for long descents; he had to keep his brakes on, and he probably hindered more than he helped her speed.

Their progress did not go unnoticed in the human crowd. Overcome with disgust — to see a mechman holding hands with an attractive, honey-haired young girl! — Preservers and Skeptics alike shouted insults and epithets as they rushed by.

"Throw it out!" someone howled — meaning Garçon, who bristled at the use of the objective pronoun. Mechfolk weren't entitled to personal names, but to be referred to as an "it," as if his tuning devices weren't as sensitive as

those of any human being, sent shocks throughout his circuitry that he could not control.

"What's that doing in here?" a man with a drugdrink ruddy complexion yelled. "We got laws against that!"

"Mechmuck!"

"Call the cops!"

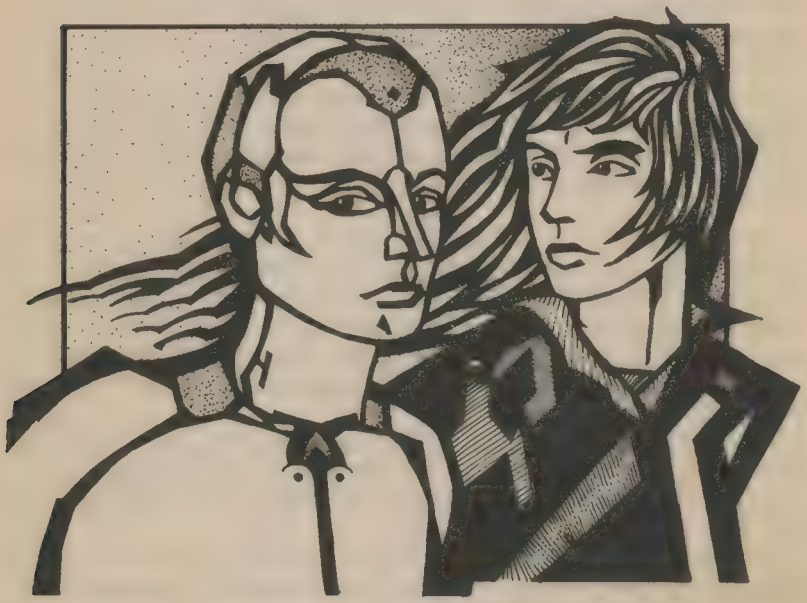
"Kick it out!"

"Wouldn't your father be proud of you!" a woman with a baby in her arms said to Amana as she passed. Amana responded by gripping Garçon's upper left hand even more tightly and flinging her free arm around his neck. He longed to kiss her, but now was clearly neither the time nor the place.

When they reached the platform at last, his wheeled undercarriage screeched to a halt. Amana helped him up while all four of his arms waved off a hail of popcorn and drugdrink containers. Not knowing how else to express his gratitude to the two heroes and protectors of his kind, he prostrated himself at the feet of the towering holograms.

Voltaire peered down. "For God's sake, get up. Except for purposes of lovemaking, I can't stand to see anyone on his knees."

Voltaire then dropped to his knees at the feet of the towering Maid. Behind Garçon and Amana, the crowd surrendered what was left of its restraint. Pandemonium broke out.



Overcome with awe, Garçon rose and embraced Amana with three of his protective arms. The fourth one he carefully placed over her head to shield her from the barrage of objects hurled from the snarling crowd.

"They're making love!" Tech exclaimed in the stands.

"I know," Maquina said. "Isn't it beautiful?"

"It's a travesty!" said the planet-renowned Skeptic.

Monsieur Bondieu said nothing. He could not avert his eyes. Before a multitude of Preservers and Skeptics, Joan was shedding her armor, Voltaire his wig, waistcoat, and velvet breeches, in a frenzy of erotic haste. "We should've known we could not trust Americans, Westerners more decadent than ourselves! From now on, my party does business only with chaste Asian firms!"

"You'll never have the patronage of Skeptics again, either," Tech's client said with a sneer.

"You're fired," said the president to Maquina on his right and Tech on his left.

"It's true," Maquina said, her eyes fixed on the screen. "What they say about the French."

"No, it isn't," said Tech. A strong urge to show what *his* countrymen could do possessed him. "Care to join me for a drugdrink? I have a proposition for you. In fact, two."

Now that the whole planet had seen what they could do, they did not need Artifice Inc. They'd form Maquinatech. What a team he and Maquina would make! Professionally as well as personally! They'd take Joan and Voltaire on the lecture circuit, 3-D talk shows, movies, home video sim-instant cocktail parties, and corporate and government demos to show off their skills. Nuts to working for others! Joan and Voltaire would work for them, and in the grand American tradition, they would work for themselves.

"This drugdrink place," Maquina said. "Is it near the Employment Office?"

"No. It's near my apartment."

"Hmmm." In a voice hoarse with sensuality, she said, "Can't we wait until this is over?" She leaned into him in a way that made him want to leave at once.

"We'll watch it later," Tech said, adding in a whisper, "when we're all alone." Taking her by the elbow and turning away from Nim and the rest, he ploughed his way with Maquina through the unruly crowd toward the nearest exit.

Kneeling before her, Voltaire murmured, "Become what I have always known you are — a woman, not a saint."

On fire in a way she'd never known before, not even in the heat of battle, she pressed his face to her bared breasts. Closed her eyes. Swayed giddily.

Surrendered.

A jarring disturbance at her feet made her glance down. Someone had flung Garçon 213-ADM, no longer in holo-space, at the screen. Somehow he'd manifested himself and the sim-cook girl he loved in real unsimulated space. But if they did not get back into holo-space at once, they'd be torn apart by the angry crowd.

She pushed Voltaire aside, reached for her sword, and ordered Voltaire to produce a horse.

"No, no," Voltaire protested. "Too literal!"

The last thing she remembered was Voltaire shouting words of encouragement to Garçon and the cook. Then the entire coliseum — the hot-faced rioting crowd, Garçon, the cook, even Voltaire — vanished altogether at once.

"Ah, there you are," said Voltaire with a self-satisfied grin.

"Where?" Joan said, momentarily disoriented.

"Is Mademoiselle ready to order?" The question was apparently a joke, for Garçon was seated at the table like an equal, not hovering over it like a serf.

Joan sat up and glanced at the other little tables. People smoked, ate, and drank, oblivious as always of their presence. But the inn was not quite the one she'd grown used to. The honey-haired cook, no longer in uniform, sat opposite her and Voltaire, beside Garçon. The DEUX on the inn's sign that said AUX DEUX MAGOTS had been replaced by QUATRES.

She herself was not wearing a suit of mail and armored plates, but a one-piece backless jumpsuit whose tunic hem stopped at her thighs, provocatively exposing her legs. A label between her breasts bore the same Paris designer logo — a deep red rose — as on vestments worn by the other guests. Voltaire was ostentatiously attired in a modern pink satin suit. She praised her saints — he wore no wig.

"Like it?" he asked, fondling her garment's hem.

"It's a bit . . . short."

With no movement or effort on her part, the tunic shimmered and became tight, silky pantaloons.

"Show off," she said.

"I'm Amana," the cook said, extending her hand.

Joan wasn't sure if she was supposed to kiss it or not. Apparently not. The cook took Joan's hand and squeezed. "I can't tell you how much Garçon and I appreciate all you have done. You got us out of a very tight spot."

When a mechman wheeled up to take their order, Garçon 213-ADM looked at Voltaire and said in a sad voice, "Am I to sit while my *confrère* must stand?"

"Be reasonable!" Voltaire said. "I can't emancipate everyone all at once. Who'll wait on us? Bus our dishes? Clear our table? Sweep up our floor? I must have time to think. In the meanwhile, I'll have three packets of that

powder dissolved in a Perrier, with two slices of thin lime on the side. And please don't forget, I said *thin.* If you do, I shall make you take it back."

"Yes, sir," the new mechwaiter said.

Joan and Garçon exchanged a look. "One must be very patient," Joan said to Garçon, "when dealing with kings and rational men."

The president of Artifice Inc. locked the door to Tech's office from the inside.

"I want them both deleted," he told Nim.

"It might take time," Nim said. "I'm not that familiar with what he's done."

Nim called up both Joan and Voltaire.

"I want those two WIPED OFF THE PLANET!"

"Yessir."

The 3-D space of the office refracted with strobed images of both Joan and Voltaire.

"You can't do that," Voltaire said, sipping from a tall glass of Perrier. "We're invincible! Not subject to decaying flesh like you."

"Arrogant, isn't he?" the president fumed.

"You died once," Nim said. "You can die again."

"Died?" Joan said. "You're mistaken. If I'd ever died, I'm sure I would remember."

Nim studied the control board, tentatively pressing keys here and there. "Your re-creators deleted your memory of your death. You were burned at the stake."

"Nonsense," Joan scoffed. "I was acquitted of all charges. I'm a saint."

"Nobody living is a saint. The church makes sure saints have been dead for a long time. They play it safe." He turned to the president and said, "Got a laserlight? Hold it in front of her." Nim tweaked the program while the president held up the white-hot beam.

"I've led thousands of warriors and knights into battle," Joan said. "You think a sunbeam glancing off a tiny sword can frighten me?"

"I haven't found it yet," Nim said to the president. "But I will, I will. As for you," he said to Voltaire, "your attitudes toward religion mellowed only because Tech deleted every brush with authority you ever had, beginning with your father."

"Father? I never had a father."

Nim smirked. "You prove my point."

"How dare you tamper with my memory!" Voltaire said. "Experience is the source of all knowledge. Haven't you read Locke? Restore me to myself *at once.*"

"Not you, no way. But if you don't shut up, before I kill you both, I might just restore *her.* You know damn well she burned to a crisp at the stake. Damn!" he exclaimed when, instead of adding to the Maid's memory, he in-

advertently called up a café, a mechwaiter, and a cook.

"Delete!" The president snapped off his laserlight. "Don't add, you idiot, delete!"

"Delete what?" asked Garçon.

"The Scalpel and the Rose," Voltaire said. In response to Garçon's uncomprehending look, he added, "Me and the Maid."

Garçon covered the short-order cook's human hand with two of his four. "Us too?"

"Yes, certainly!" Voltaire snapped. "You're only here on our account. Bit players! Our supporting cast!"

"Well, you don't have to rub it in," the cook said, drawing closer to Garçon. "He's got low enough self-esteem as is."

"My god," the president said. "They bicker like my wife and kids at home."

"Ah," Nim said. "This might work."

"Do something!" cried the Maid, wielding her sword in vain.

"*Au revoir,* my sweet *pucelle.* Garçon, Amana, *au revoir.* Perhaps we'll meet again. Perhaps not."

All four holograms fell into each other's arms.

Nim hesitated, wondering where deletion ended and murder began.

"Don't you go getting any funny ideas," said the president.

On the screen, Voltaire softly, sadly, quoted himself:

"Sad is the present if no future state
No blissful retribution mortals wait . . .
All may be well; that hope can man sustain;
All now is well; 'tis an illusion vain."

He reached out to caress Joan's breast. "It doesn't feel quite right. We may not meet again . . . but if we do, be sure I will do something about that."

The screen went blank.

An exclamation of triumph burst from the president's lips. "You did it, you *did* it!" He clapped Nim on the back. "Now that we're rid of them, maybe we can win Bondieu and his know-it-all archenemy back."

Nim smiled uneasily as the president gushed on, promising him a promotion and a raise. He'd figured out the delete procedure, all right, but the info-signatures that raced through the holo-space those last moments told a strange and complex tale. The echoing, infinite cage of data had resounded with disquieting, odd notes.

Nim knew that Tech had given Voltaire access to myriad methods of numerical control. That was a violation of the usual precautions, but a slight one. What could an artificial personality, already limited, do with an infinite battery of complex techniques?

But both Voltaire and Joan, for the debate, had been given enormous

memory space, great volumes of personality-realm.

In that time, while they emoted and rolled their rhetoric across the stadium, across the very planet . . . had they also been working feverishly? Strumming through the entire global net? Finding crannies of data-store where they could hide their quantized personality-segments? Had they, like insect hordes, spread through the info-complex of the entire world?

The cascade of indices Nim had just witnessed hinted at that possibility. Certainly *some*thing had used immense masses of compu-space these last few hours.

"We'll cover our ass with some public statement," the president crowed. "A little crisis management, and it'll all blow over."

"Yessir."

But in that last moment, as Nim moved to erase the lot of them forever, Voltaire had impishly grinned, arched his brows and — before Nim could make the delete command — vanished. Trickled away, like grains of digital sand, down the obscure hourglass of time. ✪

THE LITERARY CAREER OF GREGORY BENFORD
Current Directions . . .

Somehow, readers believe that hard science-fiction writers care only for science. Most people seem to feel the same about scientists — we're supposed to be narrow, beady-eyed, devoted only to our obsessions with genetics, or organic chemistry, or plasma astrophysics.

Nobody believes this of insurance salesmen, for some reason. Perhaps they feel that science is so hard, to be any good at it one must concentrate totally. There is some logic to this, actually. Isaac Newton said that his intelligence was not truly so great, and his quality, which made all the difference, was his ability to "fix upon a problem for as long as required to penetrate it."

In my experience, scientists have a remarkable range of interests. History is one of mine, along with sports and music. When I wrote a novel about Greek Mycenean archaeology, *Artifact*, some friends were surprised that I would take time to learn such an arcane subject. Actually, I had enjoyed doing the research more than I ever like humdrum writing — who wouldn't savor traveling the Greek islands, puttering about archaeological digs?

Similarly, I like certain eras of more recent history. The enormous clash between religion and science was perhaps the crucial break we made with the past, a battle still going on even in this country. The scientific world view has had to pry whole domains of discourse from the dead hand of orthodoxy. You need only consult your daily newspaper to see that the process will probably never be finished.

To me, the French philosopher Voltaire was a genuine hero. Yet he was a mass of seeming contradictions. Few realize that he was one of the richest

men in France, wealth not inherited but earned by constant writing and shrewd management. Joan of Arc fascinated him, perhaps because he felt that she showed clearly how a brave spirit can be used for largely pointless reasons.

One day I thought about how they would strike sparks from each other, if ever they could have met. Separated by more than a century, nonetheless I felt they would have a certain kindling effect on one another. . . .

So I contrived a way they could meet. If not in the past, then let us go to the future — a world able to synthetically develop whole intelligences.

Marvin Minsky's *The Society of Mind* adroitly set forth a model of human intelligence as a community of subprograms, all interacting and performing tasks. I had evolved a similar view of artificial intelligence and used it in two recent novels, *Great Sky River* and its sequel, *Tides of Light*. Minsky's view is far more detailed, of course, but its principal conclusion I believe allows my fictional meeting of the scalpel and the rose to make sense. True artificial intelligences will inevitably resemble us, because we will build them up following as nearly as we can the architecture of our own minds.

This means we will need to base machine minds on concrete personalities, complexes with integrated emotions and ideas. Why not base them on real people? That might save effort and would certainly be more stimulating.

So I wondered what kind of society would want to do that . . . and the rest followed.

. . . and Past Achievements

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SF CLICHÉS VI: IMMORTALITY

You do not want to live and never die
Till reason rots and humor disappears
You'll have to wave the ones that you love good-bye
Or worse, endure them all those endless years.
You will be sorry that you soldiered on
When others chose as blissful dust to dwell;
When all your stock of anedotes is gone,
All space and time looks like a cheap motel.
You will not like the world your children build:
It will be strange and dull and bleak and mad;
You'll leave what span you're given unfulfilled
The same damn ways you wasted what you had.
To use her basely Time will not forgive:
You do not want to live, who do not live.

— John M. Ford

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Inflections

The Readers

Dear Mr. Price:

As a philosopher, I have always been perplexed by the problem of the infinite versus the finite, although I hesitate to apply the word "terror" to my feelings on the subject. But I read Gregory Benford's "Pascal's Terror" several times, and I want to share my thoughts on the matter. I do have a theory of infinity, but I admit to some lingering doubts every time I get to thinking about unlimited quantities.

First, there is the void, and it stretches out infinitely. I have no way of confirming this by contemporary standards, since the void has no observable properties, but neither can I really believe that there is an end to extension. I call the void "abstract being" and consider it to be true space. Both the container and relational theories of space, I hypothesize, are wrong. There is space as I have described it, and physical reality moving in it; space, then, doesn't contain (physically hold) anything, and it isn't a relationship between physical objects. It simply has no physical characteristics.

Although space stretches out infinitely, there are finite segments of it (a four-inch cube, a foot-long line, etc.). Do we then involve ourselves in an infinite regress when we attempt to divide one of these finite segments repeatedly? There are unextended points, but any given point in space is one if we could only isolate it. So the void, it seems, is totally composed of individually unextended points. However, that there is extension is self-evident; unextended points (simple locations), therefore, are compositely extended. According to this line of reasoning, a finite line segment, or any geometric figure, is made up of a finite number of simple locations which are, together, extended. Finite line segments, then, aren't infinitely divisible.

Specifically, to assert infinity is to deny that there is a sum. We can't talk about ratio and proportion, more and less, etc., then, when discussing infinity. These relationships simply no longer exist once we transcend the finite. There are, in fact, I believe, an infinite order of infinities.

But, no matter what mode of infinity we are talking about, there are an infinite number of finite units making up that particular mode.

Sincerely yours,
James T. Sizemore
318 Hale Avenue
Romeoville IL 60441

Dear Mr. Price:

With regard to Mr. Silverberg's column on creationism in the July 1989 issue, may I insert a few words for those Christians who don't wish to have our children taught a spurious "creation science"? It is impossible that anyone will ever convert the Fundamentalist Christian Right to Darwinism by logic. The impetus of their attack on evolutionary theory is fear that the beliefs with which they identify so closely cannot stand up to the light cast upon the universe by modern science. It is the tragedy of

this kind of fundamentalism that it wraps itself in a finite, mechanistic, earthbound god that can be contained within the limits of the human intellect. It is a shame that some fundamentalists do not believe that the faith they pass on to their children is not strong enough to withstand either scientific discoveries or a little secular literature and rock and roll.

I am a Christian. I hold some beliefs in common with the fundamentalists, and these beliefs are vitally important to me. I do believe, however, that the universe was created by God some 20 or more billion years ago. I also believe that theories such as evolution are reasonable explanations of how we got where we are. The God who created this universe is something greater than the fundamentalists' god. A scientific discovery can never disprove God. How can it, when belief in God (in any religious system) is an act of faith, and not susceptible either to logic or to scientific proof? Surely, the reason God gave us scientists is to enhance our understanding of creation by exploring and explaining it.

The great value of the Bible is not that it contains truth about science, but that it contains truth about people (and God). In dealing with the fundamentalist, the challenge is to help him to accept that God encompasses the reality the sciences are discovering. This will be better for him and for the rest of us than using ridicule and condemnation to drive him deeper into the protective shell of dogma.

Thanks for the ear. This subject is too complex to be treated adequately in a letter, or even in the "Reflections" column. Congratulations on your superb magazine. I've been reading it regularly for about eighteen months. I feel the quality of writing and story content in most of your material is outstanding, and I plan to keep on reading *Amazing® Stories* for a long time to come.

Sincerely,
Roger Tulk
59 Rolls Avenue
St. Catharines, Ontario
CANADA L2N 1W3

Dear Pat:

Rebecca Ore seems to have missed the point of my article ["The Faery King on Epsilon Eridani III: Science Fiction in Genre Fantasy," May 1989] and is busy trying to pick nits. The point of the article was that all the divisions among "SF" and "fantasy" are silly, and all else is incidental. But then the pedantic do like to dwell on the trivial. . . .

The only one of her statements which I will respond to here is that the *Orbit* anthology series must have made money because it continued for years. Continuation does not mean it was a success; neither does it mean the New Wave wasn't losing its readership. If I remember correctly, there were almost ten volumes of *Orbit* which never saw a paperback edition. How I interpret this is that the paperback editions proved unprofitable for their publisher. The hardbacks continued because of library sales, and sales to the few fans who wanted to read them. That was enough to support the series for a time; but in the end, it couldn't sustain itself either. Consider — a much more accessible anthology series, Terry Carr's *Universe,* lasted much longer (and in fact is still going on, edited by the Silverbergs). No, I think the stigma of the "New Wave" pretty much did in *Orbit.*

Best wishes,
John Betancourt
4946 Saul Street, #2F
Philadelphia PA 19124

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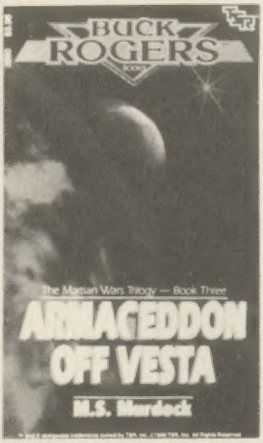

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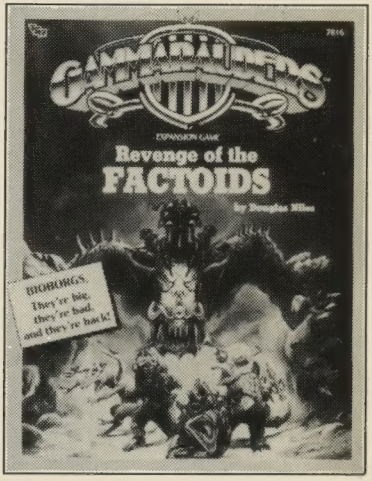

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